



# A THEORY OF LAUGHTER

WITH SPECIAL RELATION TO  
COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

*by*

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## PREFACE

Many theories have been put forward in explanation of why we laugh. Not even one, however, has proved thoroughly convincing or wholly adequate. They seem to be like so many lines on a surface, crossing and intersecting one another, without passing through the centre of truth. I am not insinuating that those who have written about laughter are all ignorant or blind, but one cannot help noticing the differences in their views. If these great writers had got at the truth, they could not have shown such fundamental divergences, and there should have been an end to all discussion. I admit that truth in this matter is not so easily reduced to the form and clearness of a mathematical formula. But there should not be any basic disagreement either. Theorists about laughter have postulated assumptions from which they argue brilliantly, helped forward by large experience and great powers of logic, but their assumptions are often incomplete or irreconcilable. And hence their conclusions show a width of divergence which can be measured only in relation to the differences in their postulations.

Hobbes explains laughter as arising from a feeling of "sudden glory". But Professor Baillie considers that laughter "neither belittles nor magnifies the person laughing at the object". Yet Bain had remarked that

one common aspect of the ridiculous is "degradation". Bain writes of the laughter of Humour, "It still grows out of the delight in malignity". But Professor McDougall would emphasize, "Humour is essentially laughter at ourselves". And Professor Bergson views laughter as springing from "the mechanization of Life".

These quotations show only a few points at which these theories go against one another. I have not quoted them in order to prove that these theories are valueless. On the contrary, Hobbes, Bain, Baillie, Bergson, and McDougall have contributed definitely to our knowledge of the nature of laughter. Indeed with their powerful intellect it cannot well be otherwise. If they disagreed in their conclusions it is because they have disagreed in their starting points.

It is the purpose of the following pages to suggest a theory which does not seek to, and indeed it actually does not, contradict, but which instead comprehends and reconciles the observations of those great writers. If the reader feels that the explanation put forward here reconciles all that has been truly observed of laughter, then it is possible that it is not merely just another new or tentative hypothesis adding to the confusion, but the actual truth itself.

But I must put in a word of caution. My explanation is based on McDougall's conception of the nature of

instincts. Those who consider that his conception of the instinctive basis of mind is fundamentally defective or wrong cannot, naturally, find any truth in my explanation of the nature of laughter. For them these pages are not written. I am convinced of the truth of McDougall's main contention regarding the nature of instincts and their relation to mind, but I am not convinced that his statements about laughter have given us the whole truth. He, too, was led away by a certain amount of falsity in his assumptions. But it must be admitted that, so far, he has arrived nearer the truth than any of the others. And I am sure I should not have been able to present this explanation but for McDougall's theories in Psychology.

It may also be noticed that Professor Bergson, in discussing the nature of laughter and the comic, was logically and inevitably led to a consideration of the nature of Art in general. I think a true instinct led him to that position. At any rate, my wanderings in pursuit of the origin of laughter have led me also ultimately to the borders of Art, and I have been tempted to offer a definition of its nature. Here, as well as in the case of laughter, I have very little to say that is altogether new. What I have done, what I have been forced to do, is just to recognize a different standpoint, looking from where we find fewer contradictions between what others have said so far.

It is this feeling that according to my explanation there is more truth in some of those theories about laughter and art than is commonly accorded to them, that they are not after all so contradictory to one another, that they, indeed, cannot be so absolutely conflicting with one another, coming as they did from men who were not foolish or ignorant, which has tended to convince me of the truth of what I have said in this book. It is of the nature of Truth to reconcile and harmonize rather than to sever and separate. For in seeking truth we are really seeking to establish a consistency, continuity, and unity between the apparently diversified phenomena of experience; and search has been from the beginning for the One Truth which would unite and explain All and EVERYTHING. And if it is true, as modern European psychologists like Freud are beginning to realize in part, that our experience is an outward projection of the elements of our inward consciousness, then such a search is only the outward reflection of an inward urge towards closeness and cohesion, unity and harmony. Human Evolution has not apparently stopped, but is definitely tending towards the creation of the fully integrated individual. What may be thereafter we cannot even guess. The ancient Rishis of India pointed out, however, that such integration is an essentially preliminary condition for a union with the Divine, a reabsorp-

## P R E F A C E

tion into the ultimate ONE. And the LORD KRISHNA saith,

If harmony verily prevaiileth when the embodied goeth to dissolution, then he goeth forth to the spotless worlds of the great Sages.

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It remains for me to add a word of acknowledgment. In preparing the manuscript for the press my Publishers gave me many suggestions which I have utilized without hesitation. To put it briefly, the present form of the book is almost entirely due to their wise suggestions. I am also thankful to them for kindly arranging to examine the proofs.

KRISHNA MENON

TELLICHERRY  
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# A THEORY OF LAUGHTER

## CHAPTER I

*The Real Problem in Laughter—Laughter, a Psycho-physical activity—A Demobilization of Forces—Laughter and Smile—Laughter and Animals—Tickling—The instinctive nature of Laughter*

We all laugh. But those who have till now discussed laughter have all assumed for truth that we laugh at a certain object, circumstance, or situation. To laugh at an object, circumstance, or situation, this must be laughable, must contain something which provokes laughter. What is this something? they ask; and pursuing this line of investigation they arrive at explanations which, nevertheless, do not altogether convince us.

Now, let us ask ourselves—do we really laugh *at* an object or situation? If this were so the same object or situation, theoretically speaking, must make everybody laugh. Is this so? It is well known, and indeed observable by all, that what makes one man laugh may even make another angry. Sugar is sweet, but it is sweet to everybody. You may not like it overmuch but you cannot deny that it is sweet. That a person dislikes sugar is no reason to consider it as anything

else than sweet. In this sense, a situation, if it is laughable, must be so to everyone, whether he is pleased to recognize it to be so or not. That this, however, is not so has been recognized by all. It is then fairly obvious that in assuming that persons laugh *at* a situation we are assuming more than the facts. We may assume only that *in* certain circumstances or situations people feel impelled to laugh. This fundamental and very obvious point of fact has been missed or ignored in all discussions about the nature of laughter, probably because it is too obvious. Hence all the various divergences of opinion among even the acutest minds. Notice that this is not merely a difference of preposition or idiom. Between the two assumptions there is a difference of attitude. When we assume we are laughing *at* a thing we are investing the thing with an importance that it has yet to be proved it possesses. We shall not then assume so much, assume the truth of what we have got to prove. At the present stage, we are only certain of one thing; that you and I and others laugh, that we laugh in certain circumstances; whether these be the cause or occasion only of laughter belongs to a later stage of our investigation.

What is laughter? That it is a psychophysical activity all are agreed. For convenience' sake we may approach the problem from the physiological point of view. McDougall writes: "Physiologically, its immediate

effect is to stimulate the respiration and the circulation, to raise the blood pressure, and to send a fuller stream of blood to the head and brain, as we see in the ruddy face of the hearty laughers. Psychologically, it works by breaking up every train of thinking and every sustained activity, bodily or mental. Here presumably, Spencer's theory finds a partial or inverted application. The nervous channels of laughter drain off energy from all others, but they do not serve merely to get rid of surplus energy as a waste product; rather they are evolved in other directions, in order that by draining

unharassed by the past."

Professor Baillie, in slightly more technical language, notes thus: "To the physiologist, laughter appears as a vocal sound of an explosive character, produced by the chest relieving itself of a deep inspiration of air through disconnected spasmodic contractions of the diaphragm, which vary in interval, volume, and quality according to the special structure of individuals and the character of the emotion to be expressed. Its cause seems to be the sudden liberation of a temporarily increased accumulation of central nervous energy,

which seeks to discharge its whole force at once, and in doing so diffuses this force throughout the entire organism, but more especially through the outlet of the throat and the mouth, in a succession of gradually diminishing shocks or shakings. This explains why the blood is congested prior to the laugh and resumes its natural flow after the laugh has taken place. As a result of the deep inspiration of oxygen and the flooding of the blood vessels, the eye brightens, and the face lightens up. The whole organism is increased to a higher pitch of activity; and when the laughter dies down, there is an intense organic sensation of relief."

It is unnecessary to explain where these two accounts differ. We shall be content to notice that they agree in observing in laughter (1) an increase and accumulation of energy; (2) a sudden breaking up of this energy; (3) a consequent sense of relief and relaxation. And they also agree in *not* saying how exactly an object or situation affects our organism in this violent and convulsive manner. They do not, again, tell us why this diffusion and breaking up of energy should take this particular form called laughter. There is an increase of energy on other occasions also, which, however, does not seek this form of outlet. Is laughter, as we see it, merely a gaping of the mouth to let out the large quantity of air we had breathed in at the time, accompanied by a vocal sound to help out the

air sooner? When we are inhaling the fragrance of a sweetly scented flower, we also take in a large quantity of air, and we breathe this out as well, but we do not laugh. Why then should breathing out in laughter be accompanied by a vocal sound? None of these and other difficulties have been touched in the accounts quoted.

Let us now turn to examine things for ourselves. When we are placed in a certain situation there is felt to be an increased flow of energy. There must, then, so far as the particular person is concerned, be something in the situation which affects him in this way. And if such a situation does not affect another person in the same way, we shall not be wrong in considering that the consequence has probably more to do with the person than with the situation—that the situation is more likely to be an *occasion* than the *cause* of laughter in the strict sense of the term. We are then justified in seeking for the cause in the person himself who laughs and not in the situation. Indeed, it looks as if this must be so, for the cause of laughter, if it lay in the situation, theoretically must be capable of producing the same effects in all persons.

The question then in regard to laughter is not "what is there in a situation which makes us laugh?" but what is it in us that makes us laugh when placed in certain circumstances? This orientation of the prob-



lem is not arbitrary. It is the only line of investigation. This was missed by former investigators because, as I pointed out, they assumed more than the facts. The cause of laughter is more intimately connected with ourselves, the subject, than with the object, and laughter has to be explained subjectively rather than objectively.

Laughter, it is agreed, implies the breaking-up of some energy which has been suddenly stimulated and led to accumulate. What kind of energy is this? McDougall points out that it is a breaking-up of mental and physical activity, but he unconsciously puts the cart before the horse when he says that laughter *stimulates* the respiratory and other organs. If it were so, it should be easy for one to get an increased flow of energy and achieve all the beneficial effects of laughter by attempting to laugh. Laugh if you feel disappointed or depressed. But, can you? No, we cannot laugh at will. The fact is not, then, that laughter stimulates the energy. The energy is first stimulated and its breaking up in a particular manner is the laughter that ensues.

It is also a mistake to consider the energy as purely nervous or physical. In the first place, purely physical energy cannot thus be directly stimulated by an object outside of us. Secondly, even if it can be, it cannot be broken up into laughter. A cool bath on a hot day

may stimulate and refresh, but we do not feel inclined to laugh as a consequence. Better food and good digestion may increase our nervous energy, but it does not find vent in laughter. The energy liberated in laughter we feel to be something different. One should think of the energy thus liberated as an emotional energy. And emotion, as McDougall will tell you, is the affective aspect of an instinct. Logically, then, to stimulate the emotional energy is to stimulate the instinct. The instinct, thus stirred, seeks to fulfil its cycle, and an instinctive activity makes use of the physical organism. "In behaviour the whole organism is involved." There is a mobilization of forces, as it were, but for some reason, which we shall not now stop to find out, the instinctive activity is given up and the forces broken up. Laughter is thus process of *demobilization of forces* which have been brought together because an instinct has been stimulated. It is entirely a psychophysical affair. It is as it were a safety valve for pent-up emotions, and where this is insufficiently utilized, we come in the regions of psycho-pathology. It should be noted that in this process of emotional expression the physical organism is not made to work and exhaust itself as completely as it would be in a full cycle of the usual course of instinctive activity. There is no need for the physical organism to come into full play, and the release of nervous energy

stimulated for the attainment of the instinctive purposes remains unused. There is thus a balance of physical energy left over, and consequently there is in laughter a sense of physical well-being and exhilaration. In the case of continued instinctive activity the release of energy is gradual, but in laughter, because the activity is short-circuited, the relief appears to be more definitely and markedly experienced.

To recognize this truth is to recognize the naturalness of some kinds of laughter which people so far have not been satisfactorily able to explain by their theory of the ludicrous or the ridiculous. For example, the clamant laughter of victory after a severe fight. This triumphant shout of laughter, according to the theory of the ridiculous, is not laughter, or rather it is no true laughter! But we laugh then naturally enough, and to the ordinary man who is not obsessed by any theory, it is as true laughter as any other variety. He is told, however, that it is not. Science certainly has a right to correct the layman, to remove his superstitions and errors. But when a so-called scientific explanation goes against an obvious fact of experience, Science should take warning and be doubly cautious. It should not seek to obviate difficulties by merely denying them or ignoring facts. Let us without prepossession recognize laughter, wherever it exists, and be convinced by a theory only if it comprehends all

the facts. The laughter of triumph is laughter. And our explanation that laughter is a demobilization of forces does not exclude it. The victor has mobilized his forces, but he has not done this according to any mathematical formula. His energies have been freely liberated in this struggle towards the goal. The goal is realized; but there is still left unused a certain amount of energy which it is no longer possible to utilize. The energies then break up. He shouts and laughs. The laughter is natural and inevitable; and its violence or otherwise depends on the amount of the unused energy left behind.

Now, imagine that at the end of the struggle the victor's condition is one of exhaustion through wounds or sheer exertion. He is then satisfied with the result but he is not inclined to resounding laughter. There is the feeling of satisfaction, as in the case of every successful instinctive activity. Often, however, it happens that, because the instincts do not seem to work according to a deliberate measure of so much energy for this goal and so much for that, there is a small amount of energy left over, and this also naturally seeks, as is its wont, self-expression or outlet. On such occasions one is described as smiling. Laughter then is certainly occasioned by surplus energy in these cases, and Spencer's theory is correct enough: but Spencer, we should remember, considered this energy as purely

physical or nervous. He did not believe in the instincts, and herein we fundamentally differ from him.

It may be noted, more appropriately here, that McDougall's distinction of smile and laughter is unwarranted by facts. He says, "Almost all writers on laughter have assumed without question that the smile is identical with the laugh, or have regarded it as a partial and incipient laughter. I suggest that this is an error. The smile is the natural expression of the satisfaction that attends the success of any striving. The victor smiles the smile of triumph; but he does not laugh. The mother smiles as she soothes and cherishes her healthy infant," and so on. He seeks to clench the matter by saying, "Note one extreme and significant contrast between the smile and the laughter—the smile is beautiful, the laugh is ugly". Now we do not consider that the smile is partial and incipient laughter; it is identical with laughter, there being only a difference in degree in the motive forces behind. The smile we shall say is a *mild* kind of laugh. It is not necessary again for us to think of smile and laughter as something contrasted or opposed to each other in order to explain a mother's smile. Her instinct or instincts are roused when she fondles the child or is fondly looking at it. The instinct roused has liberated slightly more energy than is required by the occasion, and the surplus is being freely let off in smiles. Again, we shall

not go to the dogmatic extent of saying that a victor only smiles. He may do either. It would depend on himself. In the greatest epics of the world, the heroes have done more than smile on such occasions; they have actually laughed. And I should hesitate to condemn the powers of observation of the immortal authors of those works, even though they might not have had any psychological theory regarding laughter. In fact, it is not necessary to do so. And as for the ugliness and beauty of the laugh and the smile, one may on the same principle declare the slow walk to be beautiful and the brisk run ugly.

If "laughter" is due to the instincts, it may be asked, "Do animals laugh, seeing that they too possess instincts similar to those of man?" Theoretically, we are bound to admit, in the interest of logic, that they do. And it looks as if the facts also support this deduction. McDougall, as already quoted, remarked on "the smile of satisfaction that attends the success of any striving". Animals, then, may be expected to smile as well. It sounds unconvincing. But remember that smile and laughter are merely ways of breaking up unused energy, that when we speak of smile and laughter, we have in mind the facial expression of human beings. There is nothing illogical in considering that the lower animals must, equally with us, be capable of breaking up unused or surplus

energy, unless in their case wise nature has provided that the liberation of energy shall be in exact proportion to the requirements of the occasion. I said they must be capable of it, for it is natural for the liberated energy to seek an outlet either along the line of activity suggested by the instinct or the stimulus or by a break-up. In this sense the lower animals also smile and laugh.

But they do not laugh as we human beings do, because their facial muscles, particularly those round the eyes and the mouth, have not the same mobility and consistency as those of man. The difference, then, between man and the lower animals is one of appearance. Think of the paralytic with the facial muscles incapable of movement. He has an immobile expression, and to this extent in his laugh and smile he looks no differently from the lower animals. The nearest approach to man in regard to the mobility of the facial muscles is the ape, and here we should, if our theory is right, expect some evidence other than mere logical sequence of reasoning for associating laughter with the lower animals. Notice then that the monkey "grins", as it is called. I shall also quote McDougall's note in his latest edition of *Social Psychology*. "It is commonly said that laughter is peculiar to the human species. But Dr. R. Perkes has recently demonstrated to me the fact that his two domesticated chimpanzees

can be provoked by tickling about the neck to a reaction which remarkably resembles human laughter, including the emission of spasmodically interrupted voice sounds. The gibbon also emits an interrupted musical cry remarkably suggestive of laughter, as I have repeatedly observed in wandering through the forests of Borneo." McDougall hesitates to apply the word "laughter" to these. But our theory has logically prepared us for the fact that the lower animals laugh. That man should be able to do it in a peculiar and distinctive manner because of the possession of a more mobile physiognomy is not surprising. There are many other things, too, which man does in a *manner* peculiar to himself, but which other animals also do in theirs. McDougall has striven to emphasize a common native foundation for minds, and has been led inevitably to recognize that man and other animals do not essentially and basically differ from one another. Laughter, also, we should not be surprised to find, has affected all. Besides, we might remember that sympathetic artists, in painting domestic animals such as cats, dogs, or horses, have often invested them with an "amused" expression, and those who have been observant of the ways of such animals have not felt that the artists have in any way exaggerated or falsified experience! However, we have been wont to apply the term laughter to human beings, and for practical purposes it is not



necessary, we may confess, to expand its applicability beyond man.

But before we finally leave this part of the problem it is necessary to consider the nature of tickling and its relation to laughter. Says McDougall: "Why do we laugh when we are tickled? This is a crucial question for any theory of laughter." This statement, however, belongs to an earlier period of McDougall's utterances. Since then, he has advanced far. In his latest edition of *Social Psychology* he has arrived nearer the truth in respect of this phenomenon. I shall content myself with quoting him. "It is obvious that the tickle sensation is not in itself pleasing, but is rather annoying. When a fly settles on our face and tickles us we brush it away with slight annoyance; one can tickle oneself with a feather without provoking the least tendency to laugh, and if we are persistently tickled, in spite of our efforts to escape from the situation, we may be driven frantic. In order to provoke by tickling the laughter reaction, it is necessary to tickle in a playful, humorous manner." That is to say, tickling does not *cause* laughter, though it may furnish an occasion. How it occasions laughter, and what exactly is "the playful humorous manner", need not be considered for the present. The point for us to note is that McDougall has been led to recognize the truth about tickling in its relation to laughter, namely,

that in itself tickling is incapable of provoking laughter.

To formulate some of our conclusions: (1) Laughter is a demobilization of forces; (2) These forces are psychophysical, instinctive; (3) That in some elementary form it is common to all animals; and (4) that its biological value lies in providing an outlet for unused energy, and in providing the alternatives to repression and its attendant complications. We cannot, then, in regard to this last point, agree with McDougall that it is only "an antidote to sympathy", that a particularly beneficent nature, partial towards man, "endowed man with the tendency to laugh on contemplation of these minor mishaps of his fellow men, and so made of such mishaps occasions of actual benefit to the beholder". It is certainly flattering for us to think that Nature is partial to us and we are her favourites, but, unfortunately, Truth is rarely flattering.

We shall now turn to McDougall once again and check these conclusions. The passages which I have quoted and criticized belong to an earlier period of his psychology. But of late McDougall has shown himself inclined to modify his views. He has thus been forced to make an advance on his first ideas, and though he has not identified himself with the position which we have taken up, the reasons which have led him forward and which prevent him from coming to it,

are equally suggestive. He acknowledges that "the normal being in laughter experiences an impulse, a tendency, to laugh which often it is difficult or impossible to control". Now, this is so of all instincts, but McDougall would not consider this an instinct. He remarks, "It bears most though not quite all the usual marks of an instinctive behaviour". He is quite right not to raise laughter to the dignity of a special instinct in itself, but it has nevertheless all the character of instinctive behaviour. Now, we have considered laughter as instinctive enough, but not due to a special instinct—the fact being that we laugh because we have instincts, and not because we have a laughter instinct. McDougall himself would have easily arrived at this position if he could have thoroughly got rid of the obsession of the common theory of the ridiculous. His main argument against considering laughter as an instinct in itself is: "It does not tend to produce any specific change in the circumstances that provoke it; it seems to have no outward goal towards which the laughter-shaken subject strives and by the attainment of which his impulse is allayed or satisfied." Exactly so, and it just describes our position. The instinctive energy is liberated, there is an excess of it in some cases, and the excess is let out in this manner, or the energy finds expression in this manner instead of striving towards a goal. In both cases there

is a dissociation or diversion from the usual and natural goal of the instinctive activity, and though there is not the satisfaction of having achieved a definite end, there is, nevertheless, perfect satisfaction as though it has been achieved.

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*Types of Laughter due to Instincts and Sentiments—  
Particular importance of Sentiments—Difference between  
Man and other Animals—The Mental Conflict in Laughter  
—The Sense of Humour*

Laughter, being thus instinctive, can arise in either of two ways: by the direct stimulation of instincts or by their stimulation through a former experience. And objects can be classified as stimulating or non-stimulating; the former "interests" us, while to the latter we are indifferent. I am referring to objects in relation to us at a particular moment, that is to say, in a particular situation, a situation being a state of contact between ourselves and objects at a particular moment. Situations then, in regard to laughter, can be of two types—those which appeal directly to an instinct and those which stimulate through a former experience.

Here we come to a particular distinction in psychology, the distinction between instincts and sentiments. "A sentiment is an organized system of emotional dispositions centred about the idea of some object. The organization of the sentiments is a growth in the structure of the mind that is not natively given in the inherited constitution." A sentiment in this sense is in short the product of instinct and experience.

Thus there may be laughter due primarily to the instincts and laughter which is due to the sentiments. All laughter comes under one or other of these classes. The distinction is, however, strictly relative, and one adopted for convenience in analysis. In actual life, particularly with regard to man, the two types occur complicated, for our instincts and sentiments are not differentiated. The purest type of simple laughter can be seen only in infants. As we grow up it is apt to be more complicated through experience and the growth of sentiments. Still, examples are not lacking—the victor's smile and laughter, the smile or laugh which is provoked by the sudden announcement of good fortune, the mother's smile and laughter at her child's clumsy attempts, the lover's smiles and laughter when carrying on a *tête-à-tête* dialogue, are all important instances. No doubt there is here also a possibility of sentiments complicating the matter, but the possibility is relatively slight. To dismiss this class of laughter as no true laughter is deliberately to close our eyes against facts and to restrict the meaning of the term so as to fit it to a preconceived theory. If the mother's laugh at seeing her child at play is not a laugh, then who does laugh? The common sense of mankind has agreed to consider it as true laughter as much as any, and there is no reason why it should not be so. To seek to explain this in reference to a theory of the



ridiculous such as "mechanization of life", as regarding an object as a thing, "as an incongruity or a degradation", is merely unconvincing and absurd. No, we do not always laugh because we have a keen sense of the ridiculous, and let us not say that laughter from other causes is no laughter because it does not show a sense of the ridiculous. We laugh because we must, and we shall continue to do so in spite of "ludicrous theories of the ridiculous". If a theory of laughter can explain laughter only by excluding what we commonly consider to be laughter, then it looks suspicious. The explanation here adopted does not bring us to that position. Indeed, it can include every kind of laughter considered as such.

From the distinction above adopted on the basis of instincts and sentiments, it is easy to understand where man differs from the other animals in regard to the scope for laughter. In the case of animals, the sentiments are relatively feeble or nil, and for practical purposes we may regard them as generally incapable of indulging in that kind of laughter which has to do with sentiments. The sentiments, or the larger capacity for the organization of experience, distinguish man from the rest. Because of his sentiments he comes into more frequent and extensive contact with the world, and it is not surprising that even so he should laugh much more frequently than others. Being what he is

he is naturally bound to be more of a laughing animal. Among men, the sentiments differ according to individuals inasmuch as their experiences and inherent mental capacity differ. "A sentiment involves an individual tendency to experience certain emotions and desires in relation to some 'particular object' ". To say that this tendency is individual is to admit that in regard to a particular object two individuals must differ in their respective reactions. Is it not natural then, that in a given situation, one is tempted to laugh while another is not. Both of them might have read their Bergson and believe wholeheartedly that laughter is due to a mechanization of life, but nevertheless the responses take different forms. Indeed, even brothers having more or less common advantages and common experiences at home and school, do thus differ. The various objects from the first have evidently affected them differently, and their sentiments have grown with different organizations. Where they overlap, we may expect both to laugh at the same time, but only to the extent of this identity of sentiments; or, if they laugh, each laughs for a different reason from that of the other. This difference in the organization of sentiments is the real reason why people differ from one another in respect of laughter. Their laughter has more to do with themselves than with the outside objects. It is obvious, then, that to say that people laugh

because an object is ugly is not convincing. To argue that their ideals regarding ugliness differ is virtually to admit the importance of sentiments. We are, then, led to conclude that by virtue of this different capacity for sentiment formation, (1) man and man should differ; (2) man and woman should differ; (3) the child and the young man and the old man should differ one from the other.

But a man does not lead an isolated life apart from the rest of his fellow creatures. He belongs to a home, a village or town, a country or district, a nation, and a race. In accordance with these aspects of his experiences, he would share some sentiments in common with others and at the same time would be sufficiently individual. The similarity of sentiments between individuals would be closer according to their intimacy and frequency of association. And it is this similarity and dissimilarity which we imply when we say that an Englishman laughs differently from a Frenchman, or a Londoner from a Yorkshireman. Man being a social creature, he would, however, bear the stamp of that society to which he belongs, and thus we can distinguish between types of laughter. It is simple and understandable, therefore, that a Londoner should laugh at things which a Parisian treats with indifference, that Europeans should find things laughable which frighten the negro.

The experience which determines this growth of sentiments has a wide and varied range. We see directly, we study from books, think out for ourselves, or gather from others. In respect also of study, thought, reflection, and observation, individuals differ even though they belong to a compact and intimately organized social group, and according as they differ their laughter-reactions must also differ in frequency and variety. According as they are stirred deeply or not, again, they must explode into laughter or they may be content merely to smile. It is unnecessary to expatiate further on this scope for variety in occasion and intensity of laughter between individuals, societies, and nations. The difference and variety, we are forced to recognize, is inevitable and natural, and it springs from a difference in the composition of sentiments.

The larger capacity for sentiment-formation which distinguishes man from the other animals also gives rise to a more peculiar type of laughter in him. We saw that laughter was an outlet for the instinctive energies, and this may arise as a concomitant of, or attendant on, the fulfilment of the instinctive activity, or it may follow a partial or total inhibition of the instinctive activity. Of this latter the question arises—how is it that an instinctive activity gets inhibited in this manner leading to laughter?

When we say an instinct is stirred, we mean that

it is stirred to purposive activity. We strive towards a definite goal in relation to the object. Now imagine that an object rouses our desire (for "desire is identical with the felt impulse to activity") and as we strive on we suddenly realize that the object is not what we thought it to be. At once our activity is checked, but there is the energy already liberated, which accordingly seeks a safety-valve for expression. Notice that we have to recognize the object as not what we thought it to be if our activity is to be checked directly, and laughter is to take place. A third person may tell us that we are mistaken; we may not listen to him and we strive on. But if he convinces us that we are mistaken, that is to say if he makes us recognize our error, we give up the attempt and laugh. If on the other hand a person prevents us from the course of our activity by force, we are only inclined to anger and we strive towards our goal in spite of him. In this case no laughter arises. If it is an inanimate object that stands in our way, we seek to remove it and go forward. The third element has only complicated our efforts without checking them. No recognition regarding the object has taken place within us. That is to say, laughter can result only from the action of two processes within ourselves: the impulse to activity or cognition and the check to that activity on re-cognition, the re-cognition operating in the reverse direction. There is, then, a

conflict of two opposite impulses; the impulse to proceed and the impulse to draw back. A positive and negative current meet, so to say, and flash forth into sparks of laughter. As a result of the collision there is, as it were, a bursting-out of the energy and hearty spontaneous laughter arises giving us as much satisfaction as if we had won our goal.

To what is this re-cognition due? The answer is plain. Re-cognition is possible because of the variety of our experiences and the influence of those experiences on the formation of our sentiments. These complex organizations of our experiences make possible for us this particular kind of laughter following on inhibition, while the other animals are in this respect distinctly at a disadvantage. Perhaps one should not call it a disadvantage, for, lacking a strong tendency to organize experiences, their impulses are also stirred much less frequently. At any rate to man the scope for experience is wider, and his utilization of this form of outlet is accordingly larger.

The sentiments imply a body of "knowledge" (or experience), of which some elements are remembered and definite, while some are not remembered, or but vaguely so. The instinct in relation to an object has built up this knowledge, which in fact is only another collective name for its various experiences. If from this mass of knowledge any one were in a given situation

to give rise to a contrary impulse, laughter arises. It is possible for us to recall such an idea (or experience) voluntarily or the idea may arise of itself. In either case, the conditions for laughter have arisen in us. The dual nature of the impulses culminating in laughter is difficult to recognize, not only because the inhibiting impulse is often but vaguely remembered by us as a former experience, but also because often the interval between cognition and re-cognition is so short. The conditions which determine the length of the interval do not concern us here. Where it is very, very short, we are not able to notice, except through severe introspection, what the contrary impulse is due to. On the other hand, we have all heard of the man in the anecdote, who went to bed puzzled over a joke and surprised his wife out of her bed next morning by suddenly bursting out into violent laughter, for he understood the joke only then!

In ordinary language, then, we may say that laughter of this type arises when an object provokes two impulses in us, the dual perception being made possible because of our previous experience. This fact has been vaguely realized and we have often been told that laughter implies contrariety of perceptions; but these explanations have lacked a clearer analysis of the psychological processes involved. Psychologists have also frequently mentioned incon-

gruity in this connection, but let us recognize that the incongruity is entirely within ourselves, that it is an incongruity between our present perception of the object and our previous knowledge of it, both vague and defined—"both vague and defined", for often we laugh though we cannot give reasons for it. We have often had occasion to notice in the case of others or to experience ourselves that an object provokes laughter, but soon our laughter is checked and we regret having laughed at it. What is the reason for this? The explanation is that at first cognition and recognition took place, along a particular line, occasioning laughter; but suddenly some other idea (experience) or ideas which had entered into the formation of our sentiments shot up, affecting the inhibiting impulse partially or totally as the case may be, and we stop laughing, or do so but feebly—that is to say our energy does not break up and is allowed to run on in a different manner. We may then look foolish and regret having laughed at all.



*The Nature of Humour—Goethe and Johnson on Humour  
—The Intellectual Nature of Humour examined—Humour  
in Relation to Sympathy, Imagination, and Detachment*

Of the two types of laughter, that arising from a direct and simple stimulation of the instincts, and that from their stimulation through our sentiments, the latter, we saw, involves a conflict of perceptions or impulses. As these are purely an affair within ourselves, and as the two impulses imply opposition, laughter is the natural expression and resolution of a mental conflict of a specific kind. To the mental aspect of this particular psychophysical process, we shall apply the name a "sense of humour". There is no better phrase, and it is not desirable to coin new phrases. Humour, indeed, has been variously defined, but I am sure in defining it as has been suggested here we shall not be straining the word too much. If humour refers to the mental aspect of this particular type of laughter, laughter and smile may be used to denote the physical effect of the psychophysical activity in general, and confusion arising from the indiscriminate use of the terms avoided. The difference in signification is also more clearly expressed when we say that while all humour necessarily leads to a laugh or smile,

all laughter or smile does not necessarily involve humour.

"Humour" thus implies an incongruity of perceptions. Our first perception is from one point of view and the second from a different point of view. Considered so, humour may be taken as involving a change of standpoints or attitudes. A single such change is sufficient to create the phenomenon of laughter. But imagine a mind rich in experience of a varied sort. An object presents itself before such a mind; it is perceived, the view-point is suddenly shifted in the light of a new idea; laughter ensues; again as quickly, another idea rises up more or less opposed, and opposing, again, a conflict and laughter; and so on, so long as these ideas are capable of opposing one another. The mind, so to speak, jumps from one point to another. There is a constant shifting of attitudes in opposing directions. This peculiarity of the movement has to be distinguished from a systematic going round the object or thinking of it. In the latter case also there is a steady and continuous shifting of ground, but there is no opposition between the one and the succeeding ones. No doubt in the course of your movement you may ultimately come to the point directly opposed to your initial view-point; but you do not laugh, for here the change has been so gradual and consistent in continuity. Suddenly,

however, if you can remember your original point of view, without thinking of the intermediate ground, you see the "humour" of it and are inclined to laugh, exclaiming, "what a fool I was, I did not notice it was so funny". These frequent shiftings are possible more easily for a curious mind accustomed to think, and inasmuch as a person shows himself incapable of making such quick and sudden movement, his capacity for laughter is limited.

It is interesting to observe that this thinking about the object, this revolution in our mind, has often a physical counterpart of a similar nature. This is observable in the case of children. Children are not wont to show the armchair laughter frequently. Their whole restless organism, unaccustomed to check physical expression, reflects their mental condition much more freely than is the case with the adults. Imagine some children at play. One disguises himself like a bear and turns this side and that to attack the others. The other seek to escape and laugh at the discomfiture of the pursuing bear; but notice the tendency for the child in such games is not to run in a straight line. They go round and round, and naturally enough; but they do not go round in a steady circle either. They are laughing and laughing, and every time they laugh they shift their mental attitude, and these sudden mental jerks are clearly reflected in their

physical movements from place to place. For obvious reasons, as we grow up, our mental condition is not freely reflected in our bodily movements. Still, we also convulse and writhe and wriggle in our chair.

For the mind to go round and round an object in this manner, in an inconsecutive manner, is then to assure for ourselves a series of laughs. And if our analysis of humour is right, it follows that the man of the greatest humour is he who has the most curious, observant, and reflecting mind, who has a mind richly stored with experiences, whose mind is capable of this Puck-like alertness of movement springing from point to point. In other words, the sense of humour is quite rightly considered as a sign of great intelligence. A man who possesses such a mind apprehends things quickly enough, but his mode of apprehension is different from the logical, gradual, consistent, and scientific manner of knowing. To have a curious, observing, and reflective mind well stored with experiences is to have an "understanding" mind, and Dr. Johnson, with his usual penetration, recognized this connection between humour and intelligence when he said, "the size of a man's understanding may be justly measured by his mirth". And when Goethe remarked "the man of understanding finds everything laughable, the man of reason almost nothing" he was indicating this difference in mental movement which

we have explained. Goethe was a poet, and he intuitively saw the psychological truth. He felt that the two essential conditions for a sense of humour are a well-stocked mind and a capacity for mental hopping. He recognized that the scientific steady march of the mind prevents us from laughter, and he expressed this truth not in the manner of a psychological analyst, but in the language of poetry and conversation to which he was accustomed. Goethe's meaning was not fully apprehended by many persons, for they had their own prejudices in the matter. Thus Professor Baillie says of this remark of Goethe's: "Often the fun of the situation lies in a side issue, and to explain the case may blot out all suggestion or take the edge off all interest in them. . . ." This effect of mere understanding of a situation has given rise to the curious view that laughter is due to imperfect or partial understanding, and hence that the more we understand the less we are able to laugh. Goethe, betraying perhaps a national defect of mind, held this opinion and expressed it in the somewhat pedantic form already quoted. On reading this, one is inclined to reflect with Hamlet, "there are more things, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy". It is significant that Professor Baillie's first sentence is an imperfect and vague feeling of the point of view urged here, He also talks of side issues and of the difficulty of

laughter when we understand "understand" in the sense of scientific observation and "reason". Both Baillie and Baillie have in fact touched mental working in regard to seeing things clearly, not indulging in some gratuitous his German nationality. They are more than ourselves; they are if we laugh at them, let us make at only the human and the

A sense of humour certainly but we have noted that sense of humour. We have intensity or boisterousness a reliable index of the amount. Loudness of voice is often some men accustomed to some accustomed to laugh the slightest occasion. Some laugh in a gentle and "control" laughter from or from a feeling that in circumstances prevent us humour in a particular occasion merely by ref

and. He is using the word in which we have spoken and what Goethe has called Goethe (much more than the peculiarity of the to humour. But Baillie, not understood Goethe, and is sarcasm at the expense of Poets are seers, and greater indeed also human. But when like sure that we are laughing laughable in them.

It tends to create laughter, all laughter is not due to a sense also to recognize that the sense of laughter is not always amount of emotional stimulation. It is deceptive. Just as there are some men who speak louder, so there are some who laugh loudly, and they do so on a similar manner. Often we have an aversion to noisiness, is vulgar. These and other from gauging the depths of individual on a particular reference to his laughter. To

remember this is to escape being troubled by the difficulty of having to reconcile a sense of humour with the amount of laughter in a person. There is, however, some truth in the common prejudice against loud laughter and its association with an empty mind, for, as we saw, a lively understanding always checks the tendency to such extravagance naturally enough, by the quick shifting of the view-point. Often such an explosion may mean a lack of control due to a deficiency of ideas. But as we have seen, loud laughter does not necessarily mean emptiness of mind. Indeed it may be a sign of great vitality of both mind and body; conversely, a smile is, again, not a sure sign of wisdom and a well-developed sense of humour. At the same time we may often see men with a very well-developed sense of humour wearing a very gloomy physiognomy. Laughter in children, again, is generally more explosive, intense, and violent. This is because their instincts are capable of revealing themselves in their pristine vigour, unchecked by much wide experience. Children, in fact, do everything briskly and vigorously.

What, then, is the true index of a strong sense of humour? We may say, though in a slightly paradoxical manner, that the distinctive outward characteristic is a smileful dignity—not the rigid dignity of affectation, but the mobile dignity of a self-balancing nature,

self-balancing from the wisdom of brains, experience, and continuous reflection—a dignity that is capable of every shade of feeling, but softened down to a smile by critical reflection and assimilated experience. A man of this type perceives an occasion to laughter, but the impulse is slightly checked by some other, and soon, so that he does not burst into laughter, while at the same time to a keen observer his face will reveal a pair of twinkling bright eyes and a quick succession of smiles—so quick that it all looks continuous. His smiles reveal only as much of the profound workings of his mind as the smooth surface of the ocean reveals of its depths on a calm day. He, like the sea, is capable of great convulsions and storms and tempests, but he is capable of bearing himself through this in the grand manner of the Pacific waters when the skies are clear and everything is bright. A strong sense of humour is, then, seen in wisdom, and we shall not be exaggerating when we say that all wisdom is marked by a sense of humour, and a great sense of humour always implies great wisdom. The wisest man has the richest and liveliest sense of humour. Think of Shakespeare. Think of the hilarious laughter in some of his plays; and yet in our mental vision of Shakespeare we do not think of him as boisterous. And indeed his contemporaries have given us a portrait which harmonizes with this conception of ours. What epithets did Ben Jonson



apply to him? Not "humorous" or great but "sweet and gentle". We know that Shakespeare is wise, and we feel that he could have been only "gentle and sweet" as, indeed, he is declared to have been. And we also know that no one has surpassed him in humour.

It has been pointed out frequently that humour is essentially intellectual. Speaking of the comic, Bergson remarks that "its appeal is to the pure intelligence". McDougall says, "the reaction is elicited, not by any merely physical stimulation but only through the perception or intellectual appreciation of some complex situation of a specific nature". Baillie notes that a situation is presented and "on this situation some judgment is formed, in consequence of which the laugh ensues". In our analysis we saw that the situation is complex in that it presents more than one perception; but the number of such perceptions depends entirely on the ideas or experience which a person has. Humour is intellectual in this way, but it is not "a purely intellectual process", as Bergson considers it to be, dissociated from feeling. "Here I would point out as a symptom equally worthy of notice, the *absence of feeling* which usually accompanies laughter" (Bergson). Conceiving laughter as a mode of instinctive expression (as McDougall defines an instinct) we cannot grant that there is absence of feeling. And in the name of common sense, do we not feel when we laugh? The

difficulty here is that we are not often able to define the feeling. This is because we are ordinarily able to identify a feeling only when we are aware of the purpose of the instinctive activity through continuous motion towards a goal. We can recognize a feeling only in relation to its goal. If we fail to perceive the goal we cannot define the feeling, and we speak of a 'vague feeling which we cannot understand'. We admit that we have some vague stirring in us, but when thinking about it, we sometimes suddenly see where it leads to and we jump up and say, "I feel inclined to do this". Bergson, then, can be taken to mean only that we cannot ordinarily define our feelings in laughter, for, cut off from the natural goal of activity, the emotions look colourless and something different from the ordinary feelings which we always recognize because of their goal. Sometimes, indeed, we are able to recognize our emotions in laughter, and then, for example, we say, "I laughed at my fears". This means that the feeling of fear was roused in us, but on perceiving that there was not sufficient cause for it, that is to say another inhibiting idea rising up, our "fear", the unused energy, finds vent in laughter. We think, then, that laughter is something different from fear, for we failed to distinguish the change in circumstances and so fail to recognize the emotion in laughter as identical with that very fear, for now the feeling is

detached from its original goal. It would be psychologically more accurate to say that "my fear ended in laughter". So also in every such instance of laughter.

Humour, again, it is said, implies sympathy and detachment. McDougall distinguishes between "humour" and "a sense of the ridiculous". Of the latter he says, "when we say that a man possesses a sense of the ridiculous, we mean merely that he readily laughs at whatever is comic, absurd, or ridiculous". "Humour" he restricts to the capacity to "laugh at one's own minor misfortunes and thus to be able to make of them occasions for that stimulating and refreshing activity we call merriment". Of the ridiculous he remarks, "by inventing laughter she (Nature) created the ridiculous". And this "laughter was invented" to solve the problem of devising an "antidote to sympathy". These statements are arbitrary and confusing. It is arbitrary to restrict humour to the capacity to laugh at ourselves, and, secondly, it is not an antidote to sympathy, for that is to suggest that humour tends to make a person callous, in that any sympathy he has always tends to be checked by his sense of humour. But McDougall is also right in a very great degree. Laughter may serve as an antidote to sympathy. Man, because of his sympathetic nature, has to suffer for the miseries of others, and it is certainly a great advantage if he can avoid some amount of pain through laughter. But, as we have

explained laughter, there is no need to consider it merely as an antidote to pain through sympathy. Laughter is an antidote to all pain, for all pain is due to unchecked instinctive activity. If you can laugh at all such misfortune it is a great blessing. The wiser a man, the greater are his consolations in pain. But more than consolation, it is pure relief and satisfaction if there is laughter. But it is not generally possible for a man to get round to the other point of view in every case. Man's capacity for knowledge and experience seems to be limited, and to that extent the obstacle to our fulfilment of the instinctive activity stands immovable and we suffer. But if there is a man who knows everything, we may be sure that he will be able to laugh at anything and everything, and he will be free from pain. That sometimes in actual life we are not able to get rid of our pain through laughter is no evidence that laughter is only a device against the minor mishaps. It is so because in certain directions our experience is very narrow, superficial, and limited.

The part played by sympathy in laughter is not that it ultimately occasions laughter as an antidote to itself, as McDougall would have it, but that it widens the field of our personal experience and thus makes possible more varied and frequent reactions leading to expression in laughter. Our interest in things is

not always directly personal. It is wider, and it is so because of our sympathy or sympathies. "The fundamental and primitive form of sympathy is exactly what the word implies—a suffering with, the experience of any feeling or emotion when and because we observe in other persons and creatures, the expression of that feeling or sympathy" (McDougall). Thus we can know things directly and immediately as they affect us, or we may have a separate type of experience through sympathy. Sympathy is thus useful inasmuch as it helps us to understand situations wherein we are not directly concerned. New interests are thus created, and experience and knowledge grow. When the sympathy is very pronounced, we almost come to identify ourselves with the object of our sympathy. A well-developed sympathetic nature involves this capacity for identification with another. The larger and deeper the sympathy, the more we understand. We experience the same joys and the same pains. But pains are unpleasant, and we should like to avoid them or get rid of them. These pains, due to our sympathy, may also find expression and relief in laughter just as other pains. The sense of humour may come into play herein, but sense of humour is distinct from sympathy. Sympathy can affect our sense of humour by giving us a wider understanding and thus furnishing greater scope for laughter. And it prevents us from unseemly

laughter too. That we do not laugh at the struggles of a drowning man, because our sympathy stands in the way. Children in whom sympathy is not developed by experience do many things which appear cruel to us. Savages laugh at things which affect us differently. A savage, we are told, laughs at a drowning man. But this need not be from any impoverishment of sympathy in him. His ideas about death and death by drowning are different from ours, and it may be his laughter is honest without being cruel. Take the case of a mother when her child has a slight fall. Her face will express a conflict of emotions, and when the anxiety and fear are controlled, they find expression in laughter. Sympathy has to do with laughter only in this indirect way. Without sympathy one particular variety of experience is closed to us, and, to that extent, we shall be the poorer in knowledge and laughter.

The rôle which is played by sympathy is also played by imagination. Imagination McDougall described as "thinking about a remote object" ("A remote object is an object not affecting the senses at the moment of thinking it"). Imagination thus, as a mode of acquiring experience, helps to widen the scope for humour. And common experience is justified in considering a strong imagination as accompanying a strong sense of humour. But sympathy and imagina-

tion in themselves are not capable of producing laughter.

Detachment, again, some consider to be an essential condition of laughter. Misconceiving the nature of this detachment, and partly, the nature of feeling, they have been led to say that detachment means a dispassionate view of things. We have seen that laughter is essentially "passionate" in that it does involve emotional play. We have seen also that humour involved detachment too. But the detachment is a detachment from the regular and original goal of the instinctive activity. It is the diversion into laughter from the usual end of an instinctive activity—a shifting of the ground. It is not total personal detachment. Laughter is never impersonal in this sense and, strictly speaking, such detachment is impossible so long as we are interested in a thing; that is, so long as we perceive a thing at all. Detachment of this nature is synonymous with indifference. To perceive is to be in contact, in personal contact, with an object, and detachment and perception are opposites. You may be able to think of an object in a detached abstract way, but you cannot laugh. The detachment of humour is simply the ready and quick capacity of transition from one standpoint to another, not in the strictly continuous and steady manner but in the apparently erratic course characteristic of the process.

Yet another point we have to consider is the relation humour bears to expectation, surprise, and novelty. We often say that the unexpected or new always leaves us surprised. The remark is true enough. McDougall defines surprise thus: "It is merely a condition of general excitement . . . it is produced by an impression to which we cannot immediately adjust ourselves, which does not evoke at once an emotional and conative response. It is the momentary state of confused excitement which intervenes between the reception of the impression and the assumption of the appropriate attitude towards it, a movement of conflict and confusion between the habitual anticipatory attitude determined by the course of previous experience and the new attitude provoked by the unusual course of events." It is then natural to expect and anticipate that an object or the course of events would "fit in with the context of our experience". When it does not, we are surprised, we call the thing "new". Now, humour has been described as a shifting of attitudes, and every time such a shifting takes place there is scope for surprise, according as the object fits in or not with the context of our experience from the altered view-point. This is to admit novelty as well as an expectant or anticipatory attitude. But the new and the unexpected and the surprising do not in themselves provoke laughter. Surprise, as McDougall points out,



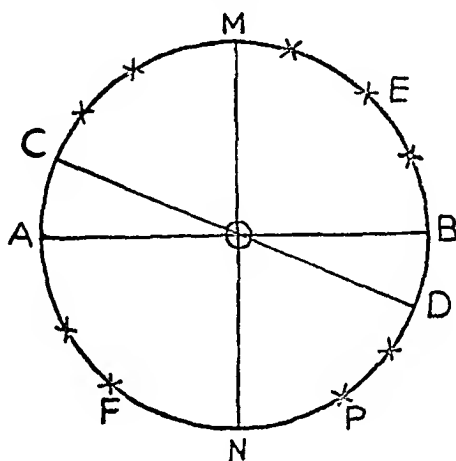
involves confusion and misadjustment, while laughter is a definite adjustment. The unexpected and the new may often be found in a situation provoking laughter, but they are not the cause of laughter. They serve to delay laughter by delaying a clear adjustment.

*Bergson and Humour—The Working of Humour—Humour  
in relation to Malignity, Knowledge, Sense of Proportion—  
Some of Bergson's Observations Criticized*

We have been insisting on an erratic mental movement in the working of the sense of humour. Bergson had a faint apprehension of the truth when he wrote: "so there is a logic of the imagination which is not the logic of reason, one which at times is even opposed to the latter, with which, however, philosophy must reckon, not only in the study of the comic, but in every other investigation of the same kind. It is something like the logic of dreams, though of dreams that have not been left to the whim of individual fancy, being the dreams dreamt by the whole of society. In order to reconstruct this hidden logic a special kind of effort is needed by which the outer crust of carefully stratified judgments and firmly established ideas will be lifted, and we shall behold in the depths of our mind, like a sheet of subterranean water, the flow of an unbroken stream of images which pass from one into another. This interpretation of images does not come about by chance. It obeys laws and, rather, habits which hold the same relation to imagination that logic does to thought." In other words, there is an irrelevant

ance, inconsecutiveness, discursiveness, but all seem to be connected together. There is a method in the madness. Is it possible to formulate the method?

It is possible and we may do so by a diagram. The use of the diagram does not imply that everything is so mechanical, and with this caution borne in mind we may illustrate our position in the following manner.



(1) In this diagram O is the object, and it affects the circle of our consciousness and experience at A. At a particular moment we perceive it from A. This perception involves an impulse to conative activity, but this impulse is checked by an opposite impulse from B, and we get laughter. There is in this case thorough satisfaction. The intensity of laughter depends on the intensity of the impulse. There is complete and total reaction.

(2) It is obvious that all the points on the other side of the line in relation to A are more or less opposed to A, with complete opposition at point B. If from A you shifted your position to only E there is no complete laughter. There is laughter, but there is also some kind of dissatisfaction according to the degree of unfulfilled instinctive activity.

(3) The Xs are among the various other points from which you might look at O. The limit of their number is in each individual case set by his experience. He has the richest sense of humour who has the largest number of standpoints. But if A is opposed totally only at B, what does the number matter, it may be asked? Everything! It is possible for us to turn from B to C. There is here some opposition, the two points being on different sides of MN. But from C you turn to its opposite at D, and in this way the process can be repeated according to the number of points available within you. But this transition requires suppleness of mind, and it implies a desire to look at a thing from various points of view other than the one immediately struck. Curiosity, reflection, and richness of experience we find thus essential to a large sense of humour. A man may have the curiosity and experience, but without suppleness of mind he can have very little sense of humour.

(4) There are two ways of moving your mind round

an object in the light of your experience. You can go along steadily from A to C and on through M to B and so on, or in the manner characterized by opposition. There is a logical continuity in both the processes, but the one is governed more by similarity and the other by opposition. It is this contrast in movement which Bergson has characterized as something akin to the logic of dreams, which Goethe implied by contrasting understanding and reason; and which we shall distinguish by using the phrases "a scientific, steady course" and "a hopping, erratic movement".

Professor Baillie, quoting Sir Arthur Mitchell, "Laughter is a state of mental disorder", characterizes it as an inadequate and absurd statement. Sir Arthur is certainly right in a measure, for the "hopping" looks apparently illogical. It is not really illogical. We can formulate the law that opposition governs the movement. If from A we went directly to B and from there to C (nearer to A) and thence to its direct opposite at D, and went on in this manner according to the possibility of greatest opposition, we get the highest example of humour. But often such complete opposition is not realized. It depends on oneself. Sometimes one can only get from A to F and from F to P. Here there is only partial opposition, and the humour correspondingly is lighter. A mind which belongs to the former type, either by training or by native

endowment, is superior to the latter type. Ordinarily we can often attempt only the second type in conversation, and the humour of deliberate literature is seen to be superior to the humour of conversation, for obvious reasons. This also explains why people who are humorous when we read them are not so in conversation and daily intercourse. The mental alertness and readiness are lacking.

Bergson is struck so much by this peculiarity in the psychology of humour that he reverts to it again towards the close of his analysis. "If there exists a madness that is laughable it can only be one compatible with the general health of the mind—a sane type of madness, one might say. Now there is a sane state of the mind that resembles madness in every respect, in which we find the same association of ideas as we do in lunacy, the same peculiar logic as in a fixed idea. This state is that of dreams . . . comic absurdity is of the same nature as that of dreams. . . . Not infrequently do we notice in dreams a particular crescendo, a weird effect that grows more pronounced as we proceed. The first concession extorted from reason introduced a second, and this one another of a serious nature, and so on till the crowning absurdity is reached. Now this progress towards the absurd produces on the dreamer a very peculiar sensation. Such is probably the experience of the tippler when he feels himself

pleasantly drifting into a state of blankness in which neither reason nor propriety has any meaning for him." The explanation which Bergson gives of this and the conclusions which he draws from it are different, but the description is just what has been described as "hopping".

The relation of opposition between impulses so as to produce laughter shows us the possibility of partial laughter. Any instinctive activity checked rouses anger. When it is checked in the manner required for laughter it finds vent in laughter. But where there is only partial laughter, there is some dissatisfaction and anger consequent on the non-fulfilment of the activity. A part of the emotional energy dissolves itself into laughter; but a part remains. We saw how in ordinary life the chances for partial laughter are greater than those for complete laughter. Even in a well-filled mind, there is sometimes bound to be insufficient opposition. If this is so, anger and pain are bound to be in actual occurrence a frequent concomitant of laughter, and we can understand how Bain came to regard laughter as springing from malignity. He speaks of "the inexhaustible pleasures of malignity", as he calls it, and associates it with vituperation and ridicule. And of humour he remarks, "there is a kind of laughter that enters into the innocent pleasures of mankind; it still grows of the delight in malignity, which, however, is

softened and redeemed in a variety of ways". If by malignity we take Bain to mean anger and pain, he is right to a great extent; we cannot, however, admit that laughter springs from malignity or that malignity is always present in laughter, but that malignity is often found accompanying laughter may be admitted. But frequent laughter without malevolence is possible only for the very wise man, though even he, being humanly limited, cannot be to that extent altogether free from anger.

Consider now the importance of the self-regarding sentiment, as McDougall calls it, in its relation to the sense of humour. "There are two varieties of this, which we may distinguish by the names 'pride' and 'self-respect'. The latter is mainly distinguished from the former in that it comprises the disposition of negative self-feeling as well as the positive self-feeling." "The object of this sentiment of self-regard is self in relation to society." "It is the most important of all sentiments by reason both of its strength and the frequency and far-reaching nature of its operations. This object 'me' thus becomes represented in the structure of the mind by a system of dispositions of extraordinary extent and complexity, a system also which is associated with a multitude of past events and objects located more or less definitely in time and place. And the connective dispositions of the system



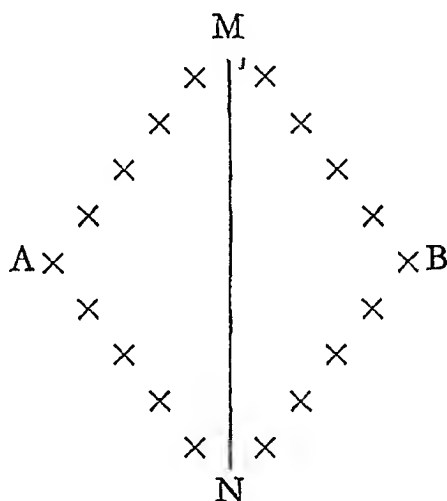
being brought into play so frequently by every social contact, whether actual or imagined, become delicately responsive in an extraordinary degree as well as very strong through much exercise. Such is the sentiment of self-regard. In the normal man the two main tendencies of the sentiment, the impulses of self-assertion and submission, are duly balanced and the sentiment is properly called self-respect. When the self-assertive tendency is unduly preponderant and takes the relatively passive form of finding satisfaction in merely contemplating the superiorities of the self, of enjoying the elation brought by the deference and homage of others (whether actual or fancied only) we call the sentiment pride; and when the superiorities (fancied or real) in which satisfaction is chiefly found are trivial or of the body merely, we call it vanity."

It is obvious that in the case of this powerful sentiment it is capable of occasioning intense laughter or intense anger as the case may be. Reverting to our diagram let us consider the ways of its working in relation to humour. O is perceived from A in the sentiment of self-regard, i.e. with reference to the ideas which are organized into this sentiment. This sentiment is delicately responsive and capable of strong emotion, i.e. from the stimulus at A, so a powerful discharge of emotion takes place. If the sentiment

comprehends an opposite point B, and this is roused, laughter takes place—laughter at ourselves. If on the other hand the person is incapable of providing a point B in his experience, the instinctive activity goes on unchecked and seeks its usual methods of outlet, and anger or satisfaction may result. There is only partial satisfaction, there is some anger or pain left behind. If the partial satisfaction is accompanied by laughter, we describe the laughter as bitter and hard. But in actual experience the self-regarding instinct is not easily opposed. We are inclined only to seek those experiences which strengthen our self-esteem, and impulses in opposition to this are rarely developed. It requires strong powers of imagination and reflection to strengthen the contrary impulses, and when Burns prayed for that gift of seeing ourselves as others see us he recognized this difficulty. It almost looks as if it were a special gift to be able to see ourselves with other peoples' eyes. Naturally, then, in regard to this sentiment, our chances of laughter are limited. In other words, the average man finds it difficult to laugh at himself. If he does, he does so but rarely. And in the case of the man of pride and conceit it is relatively impossible. The fact may be illustrated as in the diagram on the following page.

If A is a point in the self-assertive instinct, it can get opposition only from the region of the self-abase-

ment instinct on the other side of the line MN. If this latter is not sufficiently developed such impulses are rare. In most people even this half-and-half basis does not exist in the self-regarding sentiment. The tendency is to force the line MN farther from the centre as it were, thus restricting the scope for the instinct of



self-abasement. While, then, a man of self-respect (as McDougall defines self-respect) will be able to laugh at himself, conceit and pride are the foes of laughter. On the other hand, it is to be noticed that any very excessive development of the self-abasement instinct is not also a proper condition for laughter, for then the scope for opposition of impulses from the other region is necessarily limited. It is a well-known fact that religious saints, with their characteristic humility,

often reveal but a poor sense of humour. A properly balanced nature is, then, essential for a man with the sense of humour, and conversely, a great sense of humour implies a well-balanced nature. Pride is the poison of laughter. But it will not be true to say that a proud man is incapable of laughter. He can laugh by virtue of his other instincts. But in actual life the largest amount of our experiences are incorporated into the context of our self-regarding sentiment, and the other instincts are so complicatedly interwoven with it that pride practically restricts the sphere of laughter to a very narrow degree. A huge slice is thus cut off from the sense of humour, and the most intense kind of laughter will be rarely experienced. Nevertheless, it is not right to hold with some people that a conceited man is incapable of "true laughter", as they call it. Such a distinction, we found, is not tenable with regard to the nature of instinctive activity. A man can be found absolutely incapable of laughter only if all his experiences have been entirely incorporated with the self-regarding sentiment in a manner which comprehends all the other main instincts and is intensely coloured with pride, and if he is incapable of seeing an opposition thrust into his face. The self-regarding sentiment is common to all, and there is more or less pride in all of us. But it is fair to recognize that a man who can laugh at himself

has a richer and more varied sense of humour than one who cannot.

Now, when we speak of our experience regarding an object, whether direct and immediate contact or indirect and imaginative contact has occasioned it, we mean our "knowledge" of it. Experience and knowledge are here used in an identical sense, and any distinction is abstract and for convenience in analysis. We use the word "experience" when we consider the situation in relation to the person, and "knowledge" when the personal element is not emphasized so much as the mental aspect. In other words, experience is personal, knowledge impersonal. In actual life knowledge cannot exist apart from the person, but it is a useful distinction. Bearing this in mind, the various points X in our first diagram are only the various ideas, and the sum total of these ideas is our knowledge of the object.

What, then, is humour in relation to knowledge? Our idea of the object from the standpoint A is incongruous in the extreme with our idea from B. Humour is, then, the result of incongruous perceptions of an object made possible from our knowledge of its nature and its relations to other objects. An object that is existing outside of us, which has not been known to us till then, is incapable of furnishing an occasion for humour in the first instance. At least two experi-

ences are necessary. A, as the first idea, will not cause laughter; but with B gained and the two placed in positions of contrast they give rise to a spark. Where it seems to provoke laughter even in the very first instance, the new idea is opposed from some previous experience in some vague way stirred through the complex texture of our sentiments. This is laughter from a misconception, and such laughter by mistake is common enough, but we are ashamed when we know better. Even in this case a previous experience of some sort is necessary. Humour is thus a perception of incongruity through ideas already existing in the individual. We see an object from the two points, A and B, but we are likely to forget or not to notice that the shifting has taken place only within ourselves. We are apt to think that the object presents incongruities. The object may be capable of making incongruous movements or not, but in either case a change of standpoint is carried on within us. The old astronomers thought that the sun moved round the earth, and as we go in a train, "the houses and the trees go wheeling back". The illusion that humour involves always an incongruity in the object has had its origin in this manner. We may, from the intellectual point of view, say that humour is a sense of the incongruous suggested by an object in its nature and relation to other things as known to us.

"As known to us." Humour, then, is essentially subjective and not objective, though an object outside of us may stimulate the impulses. "Object", used so far, has included both objects outside us and the stimulus supplied from within ourselves through thinking and imagination. It would be more precise to speak of a situation for laughter than an object of laughter. "A situation" will then mean the contact of a person with a stimulus, whether this stimulus comes from outside of him or rises from within himself.

Again, our knowledge of an object considered objectively has three aspects; it may have to do with the nature of a thing as a whole in itself, with the relation of its various parts one to the other, or with its relation as a whole to other objects of the same class or of different classes. These two latter aspects are meant when we speak of a sense of proportion. A sense of proportion may be defined then as a sense of relations. Our knowledge includes the sense of proportion, and on a particular occasion a sense of relations is more affected than the rest of our knowledge of it. Humour, from this point of view, may be described as an interference with our sense of proportion: but such an interference is not the only source of humour.

We may now with advantage consider the truth of these statements made by Bergson. "Several have

defined man as an animal that laughs. . . . They might equally well have defined him as an animal that is laughed at." "The first point to which attention should be called is that the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly called human. A landscape may be beautiful, charming, and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression." It is not quite relevant here for us to ask what is the comic, what is the ugly. For the present we shall consider if it is the truth that man can laugh only at the human. Bergson does not want to say that man laughs only at man, for he knows that man laughs at other animals too. Hence he abstracts and speaks of the human. He would go even further and say "you laugh at a dog that is half-clipped, at a bed of artificially coloured flowers, at a wood in which the trees are plastered over with election addresses, etc." True. Our theory also does not confine the sources of laughter to man alone. Some people laugh at a bull-dog's appearance, but the dog-fancier is more appreciative of its "beauty". People laugh at the behaviour of their pets. But Bergson would say that the laughter in all these cases is due to our detection of something human in their attitudes and behaviour. Really this is too far-fetched, and we cannot easily reconcile it with



our commonsense and actual experience. I do not deny that sometimes a man may notice something human in the animal's behaviour and laugh at it, but if we examine ourselves carefully we are then laughing more at the man in our mind than the animal itself—if we are laughing at a thing at all. The animal say, the dog, reminds us of some person A and there is roused in us a sense of incongruity regarding the man. This explanation may seem to support Bergson's contention that it is the human we laugh at. But there are occasions when we laugh at an animal without thinking of man at all, consciously or unconsciously. In such cases, it is our knowledge of the animal's nature, etc., that gives us the necessary condition for laughter. And to Bergson's statement that we do not laugh at a landscape in itself, one asks, "Why not?" We laugh at an unfortunate painter's daub when he calls it a landscape. We do not look at a landscape in that manner. Our predisposition to believe that any kind of landscape is as it should be is what prevents us from laughing at it. You do not think of the landscape as the poor attempt of a definite landscape-maker. But if you thought of its Author definitely and His ways of working, or if you know something of landscape creation yourself, surely there is no reason why you should not laugh at it. We exclude from our conception all possibility of nature working in a humorous way, for we believe

that nature can never go wrong. We think of nature as impersonal and without intelligence. But, indeed, you can laugh at everything if you have the necessary mental background. You can laugh at even the gods themselves. And when Renan said that even in our worst misfortunes we can have our consolation by laughing at the gods, he was not merely rounding off a paradox. And Goethe, as we have noticed, said that to a man of understanding everything is laughable. The true error of Bergson lies in his assumption that we laugh at a thing. In inventing objects with a quality of laughability Bergson went beyond actual facts. But his brilliant powers of observation enabled him to perceive the truth in some way, for he was led to conclude that the one common thing found in objects of laughter is the human element. Hamlet spoke of holding the mirror up to nature. It is true to say that the world is itself a mirror and we see in it only our own reflection. Bergson's statement, then, that we laugh at the human, can be true only if it means that we laugh, and objects outside of us may give us occasions for laughter. Laughter is an emotional expression, and a thing in itself is never laughable. However, a falsehood is often an oblique vision of the truth, and so far Bergson is right.

Though with Bergson we cannot hold that we laugh only at what is strictly human, we may still say that we

laugh mostly at man. The vast majority of the occasions on which we laugh are concerned with man. This is natural enough, for the majority of our experiences ordinarily have to do with man himself. The self-regarding sentiment with its extent and strength attracts to itself a large part of our experiences, and holds them together as a magnet attracts and holds together iron filings. This, as we have seen, sometimes involves also a distinct limitation in regard to the scope for laughter. It prevents a man from laughing at himself, but it does not prevent him from laughing at others where his self-esteem is not affected adversely. And it limits the possibilities of laughter concerning other animals. Man thinks most of man, and he gets more occasion for laughter from man. His sympathies are not ordinarily so largely developed as to comprehend other creatures, and where it is otherwise there is no reason why he should not get occasions for laughter from them. Domesticated animals do indeed give him many occasions for laughter. But this question regarding the classification of objects in their capacity to provoke laughter is, really speaking, an idle inquiry. As I have said, we do not laugh at a thing. We just laugh. Any object, live or dead, will induce laughter in us in the degree in which it affects us emotionally, in the manner required for this kind of emotional expression.

*Humour as illustrated in Literature—Confusion in the Theories about it*

Turning to literature, let us note how humour expresses itself there. Before we proceed further, however, we should remember a very commonplace distinction—that literature is not identical with life. It would seem there is no need for insisting on this distinction, which nobody would think of denying. But as a matter of fact, those who have analysed humour in literature have often ignored the distinction. They forget that in actual life we are in immediate contact with it, whereas in literature we touch life only through the medium of the writer, and, ignoring this, they have been but too ready to lay down their laws where they should be content only to note and describe, and not define. Even Shakespeare has not been exempted from this cavalier treatment by critics.

But critical legislation for the guidance of writers may no doubt be undertaken in all good faith, and I do not mean to suggest that the theorists have been deliberately impertinent. In spite of good faith, however, their error is there. And this lies in ignoring the distinction noticed above, and as a consequence *the means and methods* which a writer has utilized for

rousing his reader's sense of humour are identified with humour itself. The writer may use any device, and so long as he succeeds in stimulating the sense of humour in his reader he is humorous; but this humour is to be stirred, not in relation to himself, but to the experiences which he presents there. To get the reader to laugh at yourself is easy, for any fool could do that, but to get him to laugh with you at what made you laugh, that is humour in literature. And the number of such situations depends on the genius of the writers; but on account of the common human element in the psychology of writer and reader, the situations so presented must represent some common characteristics and a classification of these is interesting to study, though they cannot be reduced to a formula to help in the creation of humour. These formal methods have very little value accordingly, and man, not being a machine, cannot create literature according to a formula. But they have a value in testing the truth of any analysis of the psychology of the sense of humour. Thus, when we speak of the devices, means, or methods of humour, we mean only the forms in which a sense of humour has manifested itself. Such devices are exaggeration, contrast, and degradation, rigidity, mechanization of life, etc. It will be noticed that all these phrases insist on a condition of incongruous perceptions, called differently from

different points of view. Contrast is more general, while degradation, rigidity, mechanization imply exaltation, flexibility, etc. Now as the scope for incongruity is as wide as the universe itself, it is a mistake to limit it to any one particular type. To do so is, as I said, to make the mistake of taking the form for the life within, to create ludicrous theories of the ludicrous. For illustration I shall refer to two examples:

(1) Bergson formulates one characteristic of the comic in these words: "Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned." Obviously incongruous perceptions may take this form as well as any other, but to say that this is the only or essential form is to go beyond the truth into the regions of absurdity. Thus Bergson asks: "Why do we laugh at a public speaker who sneezes just at the most pathetic moment of his speech? Where lies the comic element in this sentence taken from a funeral speech and quoted by a German philosopher, 'He was virtuous and plump'? It lies in the fact that our *attention is suddenly recalled from the soul to the body*." (Italics mine.) If this is so, we should laugh when, observing a man at prayer, our attention should suddenly be attracted to a piece of plaster falling from the wall around. We should laugh when the servant announces dinner to a philosopher reading in his library. We should laugh when

a person expressing his love to another suddenly looks at her face or holds her hand!

“Let us now give a wider scope to this image of the body taking precedence of the soul. We shall obtain something more general, *the manner seeking to outdo the matter, the latter aiming at ousting the spirit*. Is it not, perchance, this idea that comedy is trying to suggest to us when holding up a profession to ridicule?” asks Bergson. Certainly not. The comic poet may do so if he likes, but there is no reason why he should not think of making me laugh in some other way. All that is required of him is that he should provide me with the necessary incongruous stimulation. Whether he does this in treating manner and matter, or letter and spirit, or body and soul, is immaterial to me. Bergson, anxious to deduce laws, seeks to raise every expression of humour into a law by itself. Thus he goes on: “When Bridoisou, the judge, comes stammering on the stage, is he not actually preparing us by this very stammering for the phenomenon of intellectual ossification we are about to witness? What bond of secret relationship can there be between the physical deformity and the moral infirmity?” asks Bergson solemnly, and as solemnly answers: “It is difficult to say. Yet we feel that the relationship is there, though we cannot express it in words.” Now, honestly, do we feel any such thing? I am sure I did not think till now that

stammering may be due to a moral infirmity, till Bergson pointed out a possibility that it might be. If I laugh at a stammerer it is because I am accustomed to hear people talk without a stammer. In a nation of stammerers, the individual who does not stammer will provoke laughter as much as a stammerer makes us laugh. Dr. Johnson somewhere compared a woman's preaching to a dog's walking on its hind legs. Would anyone care to make a similar comparison to-day?

(2) I shall take one more example from Bergson. "We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing", says he. And after giving a brilliant description of two circus clowns colliding and jumping and falling over and over again, which he had actually witnessed, he remarks: "At that instant appeared in all its vividness the suggestion that the two artists had gradually driven into the imagination of the spectators, 'We are about to become . . . we are now become solid wooden dummies'." "I" is all the comment that one would like to make on this passage. The truth, let me repeat, is that there is no limit to the ways in which incongruity may present itself, that any situation, whatever it may be, which rouses in us incongruous emotions will stir us to laughter, and any attempt to classify the situations because of their external resemblance to one another will only serve to make us blind to the central truth within. It may be



convenient for us to classify men as Aryans, Mongols, Negroes, etc., but to take such a classification as applying to the "human" element that is common to all these types of men is to go beyond what is warranted by facts. If one were tempted to formulate a law of the comic on the lines followed by Bergson, one would like to say, "To confuse methods of achieving an end with the end itself is a characteristic of the comic".

Baillie defines laughter in these terms: "Laughter arises when the character or process of an object which is considered to refer to an end, real or supposed, is judged to be partially or wholly incongruent or incoherent with the end in view." This, again, is another way in which incongruous emotions may be roused in us, and a writer may work on these lines and give us plenty of occasion for laughter. But as an explanation of the nature of laughter it is hardly sufficient to cover all cases of laughter.

Baillie refers to this concrete illustration in support of his theory. "Almost every child seems moved to laughter at the spectacle of a malicious wind playing havoc with the dandy's dignity and carrying his hat by leaps and bounds far down the street with its owner in hasty pursuit." Here, the only connection between the object and the wearer which is required to maintain the dandy's dignity is ruthlessly broken; the object makes off on its own account, regardless of its place

in the purpose of his life; the dandy insists on the relation between himself and his hat being kept up, while the hat as obviously disowns the relationship. Neither can get rid of the other, and yet both are for the time being incongruent with each other, the dandy's dignity with the present position and doings of the hat, the hat with the present feelings of the dandy. Observe, again, that the important agent in the situation—the dandy—is not really injured in the process, he is only temporarily discomfited. Substitute a frail old man for the dandy and the situation ceases to be laughable at all but to the ill-disposed, and calls forth other emotions, such as pity. Baillie's analysis of the situation is admirable so far as it goes, but it does not explain clearly why this substitution of the old man for the dandy should cease to provoke laughter. It is obvious that Baillie also is laying a greater emphasis on the object than on the laughter. Otherwise he should have realized the full force of the difference: when it is the old man, one of the emotions roused is pity, and this is stronger than the other emotions. Pity here overwhelms the other emotion, and laughter does not ensue. But he also recognizes that where pity is not great, as in the ill-disposed, there is laughter. That is to say, laughter here is not a question of the old man or the dandy particularly, but of what emotional reactions one is capable. It is not so much a

question of incongruity between means and end, but of incongruity between emotions. Baillie insists a trifle too much on the object in relation to the subject. Yet it is noteworthy how very near Baillie comes to the truth. This is because he gives a very wide meaning to "means" and "ends". "The range of ends in connection with which laughter may be invoked is strictly unlimited", and this idea leads him ultimately to say, "We can laugh at all things, small and great; for the laugh is not the result of a calculation of weight or importance, but of the sense of incongruity of process with end in view, whatever the process be and whatever the end be". If Baillie identified this "process" with the train of instinctive activity, and the "end" with the goal of such activity, he would have been where we are. But to him "means or process" and "end" are anything; to us it is strictly instinctive. Hence his theory is too vague; and this is so because he gives external objects an essential importance in relation to laughter which, according to us, they do not possess.

Bain, analysing the various situations in life and laughter, finds that it is difficult indeed to reduce humour into a formula, but regards one common characteristic as always accompanying it: "It is only giving one single aspect under the present head to mention the widespread influence of loss of dignity

or degradation in esteem and importance." Bain's position is a virtual admission of the fact that situations in themselves are multi-faced as regards laughter, and the only thing that is common to such is the human subjective element. At the same time Bain, unable to look at it this way, finds in the situations a reflection of the actual mental process which he explains as degradation. Degradation, in fact, is just another form in which incongruous perceptions may present themselves when looked at from the point of view of the object provoking laughter. It is just another device which a writer can make use of in the mechanical manner to create humour. But, even so, the device has to be used with discretion if it is to succeed. "We refrain in ordinary circumstances from rejoicing over injury to a person or estate." That is as much as to recognize vaguely the truth that where one of the two incongruent emotions is more powerful than the other (in this case the pain caused by sympathy) laughter cannot take place. Some people can actually laugh in such situations, where a man of delicate sympathies feels only distress. Degradation, then, has a suggestive value like other devices: but, in literature or life, in itself it is not capable of explaining humour. Bain also confuses life and literature to a certain extent, though in his analyses of examples of literary humour this is not so visible. His explanation of the psychology of

the laughter is faulty or imperfect, but his analysis of the literary mechanism in a passage of humour is accurate. This is as it should be. He is perfectly right to say as he does, for example, "Hudibras finds an occasion for the ludicrous in the morning dawn. The device consists in a degrading or vulgarizing simile :

"The sun had long since, in the lap  
Of Thetis, taken out his nap,  
And like a lobster boiled the morn  
From black to red began to turn."

Bain speaks of the device of degradation in this connection, and justly. But the humour of it lies in how far to us this comparison to a lobster is vulgarizing. Vulgarity is an individual matter, and where men agree in regarding a thing as vulgar, they have built up a common sentiment. Accustomed to look at the sun with refined feelings, the comparison strikes us as humour. But I doubt if it would provoke a smile from others. Fisher-women might sing the lines without any consciousness of the humour. Sun-worshippers may consider it an occasion for just resentment as sacrilege and blasphemy, and so on. Incidentally, we may notice Bergson's interesting comment on this very passage. Bergson is never content like Bain to call a device a device, but would immediately raise it to the dignity of a law, and he brings this passage under a general rule: "A comic effect is always obtainable by

transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key. Take as an example the following description quoted by Jean Paul Richter, 'The sky was beginning to change from black to red, like a lobster being boiled'. Note that the expression of nld-world matters in terms of modern life produces the same effect by reason of the halo of poetry which surrounds classical antiquity." If so, one wonders whether Jesus had the same ideas when he spoke of nld wine and new bottles l

Bain, however, is not altogether exempt from the errors of his assumption. These are seen when he is tempted in his turn to classify the instances where "humour" has been softened. Bain suggests nine ways in which the malignity, as he calls it, of the ludicrous or of humour may be mollified, and he considers that "The essence of the art lies in mollifying ingredients that appease the sympathies without marring the delight". This is, in effect, a warning that, in suggesting incongruous emotions, a writer runs the risk of stirring some strong emotion in the reader without being able to resist and divert it into laughter. This is a real risk, and to get over it one should have great psychological insight into the working of the human mind and great powers of observation regarding the way in which one's readers would have developed their sentiments, or how one's reader's experiences can be delicately handled. For this reason, indeed, humour

in literature is a rare phenomenon in any great extent. A writer is apt to lack sufficient sympathy or to have too much; in either case he fails in humorous effects. To the extent to which a writer is capable of putting himself in rapport with his readers, or the other way about, his humour is appreciated. Voltaire's humour provoked the orthodox. A writer careless of the prejudices and opinions of his readers is apt to tread on corns and cause a howl instead of laughter.

Apart from this confusion, due to an identification of the devices with humour itself, there is another source of confusion in the misapprehension of detachment in relation to humour. We have seen detachment can mean only one thing: the withdrawal of the conative activity from its natural goal, its interruption before the complete fulfilment or usual expression, on account of an opposing impulse. This detachment may be partial or complete, according as the latter is strong enough or not. A writer, or author, may or may not feel the detachment. His humour will affect us accordingly, and in the latter case he will not impress us as a true humorist. But often a writer's cleverness will enable him to conceal his real attitude because of the reader's sentiments. The effect of the stimulus on the reader will depend entirely on himself. The author's business is to present what he thinks is likely to stimulate the reader in the manner required

by the psychology of laughter. He will impress us with a sense of detachment if the impulses which are produced in us are such as dissolve completely in laughter. We have no means of knowing how the author would have felt when he described a particular situation. Being human like ourselves, we expect that he also would have laughed.

Sometimes it happens that the author does not give us the two stimuli, but is content to give us only one. In this he depends again on the reader's sentiments. He expects that the sentiments of the reader will suggest the other necessary stimulus from within himself. In these cases, an author's success will depend on his capacity to gauge accurately the possibilities in his reader. If his judgment goes wrong, he may only succeed in stirring in the reader some other emotion, such as anger or disgust; or, where the stimulus is weak, just indifference. The mistake which many would-be humorists make springs from this ignorance of the psychology of humour. Such men are apt to think that what occasions laughter in themselves must affect another also similarly. Many an attempt at conversational sparkle ends in fiasco in this way and a man raises a laugh against himself. "He thinks he is humorous—the ass!"—so he is judged. In speaking of the detachment of a humorist, then, we judge him entirely by the effect on ourselves. The more the sentiments



are shared by the author and the reader, the more chances he has of achieving "detachment" or, in other words, "laughter", full and free.

Often this detachment is misunderstood as a kind of personal indifference or lack of interest, as a kind of impartiality. There is no question of impartiality here except in the sense that the two stimuli are equal in intensity and opposite in direction. A man, if he wishes, may thus quite deceive us in regard to his real interest in a question. Of course I do not say that authors always deceive us. They can if they wish to. Consider Shakespeare! To judge a man's interest by reference to the humour in his writings is often misleading and precarious. It is quite possible for one to make you laugh at things which he himself holds in dreadful earnest. In ascribing detachment to a writer, we are only transferring to him the effect produced on us. An author's impartiality in this matter may be compared to the impartiality of an honest judge in summing up a doubtful case to the jury. /

Detachment, again, is often confused with a dispassionate nature. This is a mistake, as we have seen, for laughter *is* the natural expression of feelings. The man who does not feel cannot laugh. Humour does not and cannot involve absence of feelings. We may more correctly speak of an abolition of feelings through laughter. The dispassionate writer is generally "dry"

and his humour will be very thin. Dispassionate writings involve a careful selection of words, an avoiding of words that are likely to stir the reader's emotions deeply. Such a writer creates a faulty impression regarding his feelings, and there is a degree of self-effacement in his writings. The impression on the reader also is correspondingly weak, and the scope for laughter naturally diminished. Such are, generally speaking, philosophical and scientific writings. But a scientific treatise does not imply that its scientific author is free from human feelings.

What has been said about "detachment" and the true psychology of laughter should enable us to judge the relative value of the various means a writer thinks of in order to induce laughter in us. A writer who feels that he cannot depend on the sentiment of his reader for an impulse to spring up of its own accord offers both the required stimuli. The most common device in this connection is called "contrast". Where, however, he can rely on us for one of the impulses, he is content to use exaggeration or degradation. These formal methods of contrasted pictures are not in themselves "humour". Contrast may be used also to heighten our pain or anger or some other particular emotion. To remember this is to realize where the theorists of humour went wrong in speaking of contrast as the essence of humour. There is contrast in

humour, but contrast as a literary device is not to be mistaken for humour. Cato might break his sword and convert it into a ploughshare.

What has been said so far then insists on humour's most characteristic feature, its dependence on knowledge and sympathy. Just one illustration will suffice. "In a very lively comedy", says Bergson, "we are introduced to a Monte Carlo official whose uniform is covered with medals, although he has only received a single decoration. 'You see, I staked my medal on a number at roulette', he said, 'as the number turned up I was entitled to thirty-six times my stake'." Bergson quotes this as an instance of humour. In this instance it is clear, however, if the humour was to be appreciated by one, he should have known beforehand that the man was entitled only to one decoration (the official had staked his decoration). A fuller appreciation of it would be possible, again, only if you had some interest in roulette. A soldier under Cromwell, who hated all games as due to the Devil's ingenuity, would, I imagine, be more tempted to be angry with the officer for his love of gambling than to laugh at his vanity. Often such instances of failure to appreciate humour are ascribed vaguely to temperaments. As a matter of fact they only reveal a lack of knowledge and sympathy, and consequent difficulty of comprehension, in a particular case.

## CHAPTER VI

*Humour—Falstaff and Shakespeare—Anatole France,  
Rabelais, and Cervantes*

We may now test our theory in another way. We may work out its full consequences in a particular line and see how far they are exemplified in literature. Imagine a writer anxious to give us the *extreme* possibilities of humour embodied in a particular character. We shall assume that the writer has the necessary genius, imagination, and insight into human nature to make it all successful in the result. But how might he conceive and present this character on the basis of the theory of humour here worked out? I should think that "F"—for so we shall name the imaginary character—would reveal these traits; he could be developed only on some such lines as these:

F should have great native gifts of intelligence and have an "alert" mind capable of "hopping about" from point to point.

F should possess a great wealth and variety of experience.

Embodying the extreme possibilities of humour, F would seek a laugh in almost every situation. Sometimes his previous experience may be expected to fail to furnish him with the necessary inhibiting point of

view. We may then be sure that with his reflective powers F would still seek to "create" a view-point.

He would be ingenious if he could not be natural.

Always to seek laughter is to get our instinctive energy broken up before it wins its goal, to get it short-circuited. Such a short-circuiting is, however, in its turn, limited by the exigencies of the physical organism. Natural desires to that extent, for example, for food, drink, etc., would then certainly be pursued. But general activity would be reduced to a minimum by the habit of seeking self-expression in laughter. F could thus easily be characterized as slothful and lazy. He would eat and drink. But he would work for this only if he were compelled to it, if his creator would not conceive him otherwise. Even if he should fail to get his food and drink at times, he would only be inclined to laugh away his disappointment. Only sheer despair would make him angry with the gods, and even so his humour would check any long-standing malice.

Barring the immediate wants of the body, he would not be the slave of his desires any more than he could help. His conduct would be different from that of others. He is anxious for comfort, but beyond this he has no ambition. He would be fond of society, but he would not care to wield any power over it. Society is to him only a vast field from which he would pick many occasions for hearty enjoyment. Society is the

theatre where he plays. Society gives him the contacts necessary to burst into sparks. Being so, the ideas which have a powerful hold on others have no influence on him—rather they have no continuous influence on him. There is a looseness and suppleness, accordingly, in the organization of the sentiments within him. He has no principles to steady him. His humour dissolves everything, and principles require a continuity of interest which it is not in his nature to give. His character is created by the circumstances of the moment. It would be difficult for us to explain his conduct with reference to the ordinary standards or canons of society. He may steal, but he is not a thief by habit. He may fight or he may choose to run away. He is not ruffled if you sneer at his cowardice, he can offer a cool and convincing excuse. You may despise him, but you cannot easily provoke him to anger. But he has self-respect, a self-respect, however, which is not based on your standard of it in yourself. You may laugh with him or at him. The number of these occasions would depend on F's creator, on the imaginative fertility he has in inventing adequate situations for F. If the circumstances are such that F has not to strain his intelligence overmuch you could laugh with him more often than at him. Again, if the circumstances are such that they do not involve a frequent breach of the Ten Commandments, your con-

tempt for him would not grow so strong as to choke your enjoyment for you. But an occasional breach, though it may puzzle our judgment when we seek to estimate F's character by our usual and traditional standards, adds salt to the dish, it must be admitted. So we shall prefer to see F going at it at times.

Always inclined to laugh, and almost always able to do so, F naturally would have few enemies. He bears no malice himself and he forgives with a laugh as hearty and sincere as any. Is it any wonder that F would happen to get loved more generally than otherwise, though despised?

Always inclined to laugh, which means that there is a break-up of activity before the end is reached, F, as suggested above, would give us the suspicion that he is slothful and indolent. But, as a matter of fact, his real capacity for action, his vigour, cannot thus be easily judged or measured. He lays himself open to be misunderstood in this as in other things. When forced into action you would find in him an unsuspected vigour that would surprise you. Why, the very fact that he laughs so often and so heartily is because his instincts are very strong, because he has an abundance of energy, though he is wont to let off steam by way of laughter. F, for example, would run away from a fight if he could get the chance: but prevent him, and force him into it, he is capable of as much valour

as any of your serious heroes. Any dog might show it, you say. True, but there is a difference. If F was running away from mere fear and forced by circumstances to remain, he would feel it painful like any; but in F's case he would not be the victim of fear for long; F would *laugh away* his fears and also fight as bravely as any. As, however, on most occasions a person could escape, F would be the first to notice the chance of doing so and take advantage of it. He would thus be known as rather a coward, and when he shows fight on a subsequent occasion an inconsistency would be laid to his creator's credit by the reader. As a matter of fact F is not necessarily a coward, and our conception of humour enables us to reconcile such apparent inconsistencies in F when he shows them. F is cowardly *and* valiant. It all depends on circumstances.

Always seeking laughter, we said that F would be ingenious at times. Does this not involve self-delusion? Yes, it does. He might delude himself on occasions, but such moments do not last. It is obvious that, possessing as he does such a rich sense of humour, his self-delusion must in its turn get dissolved.

Let us now think of what personal appearance F might be expected to possess. Here the creator of F has no hard-and-fast rules to guide him. He judges by the general experience of those to whom he intends to



present F; ordinarily there is nothing to prevent him from associating so much humour with a very lean person. But the large majority of people would seem to prefer F stout. They feel that hearty and comfortable ways of living are bound to produce stoutness, and there is something to be said for that feeling. F, then, would be made "fat". It is only appropriate, we grant, in another way. F is disinclined to work, and we associate "fat" with sloth. And if F is made just a trifle stouter than our ordinary conception of stoutness, it does not detract from his merit. It is a decided advantage for him when he presents himself before us, seeing we are what we are.

F's age also has to be settled. He cannot be convincing if he is very young. Where could he have gathered all that experience of his? This takes time, and F cannot therefore be young. The older a man the larger and more varied his experiences, and so may not F be a very old man? No, F may not be a very old man either, for then he cannot be expected to possess the energy that he has. F should stand somewhere between, more leaning to the old than to the younger and greener side. There is something appropriate, again, if F is made a trifle old in years, for you can sympathize with his general laziness much more easily seeing that he is both old and fat.

We might also take a glance round as to whom

could be fitted as F's companions. We noticed that F cannot by his very nature have a delicacy towards the moral code, or any code for that matter, of society. This is a disadvantage for him if he were let loose in respectable society. With all their sense of humour they dare not openly break that which binds them together. This means that the only society in which F could live without injury to his skin for any length of time is a society which does not think much of the Commandments—a society of thieves, lustons, etc. It is true that such a society does not give F the necessary appreciation which he deserves, and he will must therefore often fall flat. But F could be given for a companion, along with the others, somebody who is intelligent and appreciative, somebody who does not break the Commandments to deliberately and defiantly, somebody capable of drawing out the best from F, a prince if you like, openly or in disguise—though a prince disguised is too romantic for a realist like F. Besides, F might also be distinguished from the rest of his low companions in one or two ways. F need not be born "low". He might belong to the ranks of ordinary gentlemen, if not to the aristocracy. This has its other advantages, for, so, one would not be surprised if F is naturally more educated than his "low" companions, if he occasionally brings in a Latin tag or makes a reference to books. These things, again,

would give F an importance in the eyes of his low-born companions, and that other princely fellow, his creator adds, need not feel sorry that he is mixing with F. F, if princes could only know, is a prince himself in all but birth, and a right companion for intelligent princes if they cared to release themselves from the decorum of their usual life. But certainly, you cannot give F a princely companion for ever, for princes too have their duties later, and then, of course, the prince shall go his way and F his—but F's way is the way of death, for humour, even of this extreme variety, cannot thrive without a fit stimulant. And the writer, whom we imagined as working at a typical instance of extreme humour, has also to stop somewhere; he shall make his prince a king and kill his F, for stop he must.

An extreme instance of humour may then be made to incarnate on the skeleton here outlined, and if it is ventured to suggest here that Shakespeare's Falstaff presents these features I hope that it will not be considered quite so much presumption. For, in the first place, according to the theory of humour and the deduction from it of F's character, we found that while F presents apparent inconsistencies of character he is really not inconsistent. Even so, Falstaff, who has presented so much difficulty of interpretation to critics, looks natural and consistent enough. Secondly, Bain,

analysing Falstaff's character, gives a picture which does not differ from, or which touches at many points, our analysis of F's character.

Thus Bain mentions that (1) critics seem agreed that he defies the laws and decencies of life; (2) Falstaff is not a fool nor a hypocrite: he has ingenuity and resource; (3) he has unabashed effrontery; (4) much of the pleasure that he gives is very coarse and gross; (5) there is little attempt to give him redeeming traits of affection and generosity; (6) his companions are low; (7) he is cowardly and wicked. We have seen that there is nothing surprising in these features in connection with F; that some of these are as they should be. And so when Bain proceeds to ask, "The question now is, what, if any, are the defects of the personation as a work of art; which things may we reasonably object to as violating the critical laws?" the only answer is: "For heaven's sake do not talk of defects and critical laws in this temple of Shakespeare's. It is just blasphemy and ignorance." I do not suggest that Shakespeare is above all laws or critical defects, but it is just as well that we might be prudent till we know better what humour is. I agree also that that sort of reply is not sufficient answer to Bain's criticism, and if Bain does convince us of Shakespeare's defects, we must of course accept them, the less though Shakespeare may look for it, as Truth is the object in view.

Bain's objections to the portrait of Falstaff are (1) a superfluity of grossness and coarseness; (2) Falstaff ought to have had occasionally strokes of retribution meted out to him for his wicked conduct; (3) his language could have been more refined; (4) while Falstaff was a coward in real danger his admirers very properly indicate the courage of his brazen-faced lies, denials, and evasions. "This has a pleasure for us. . . . Just as we enjoy the ingenuity of a criminal eluding the search of a policeman; (5) this pleasure, however, should be accompanied by a mild abhorrence of his misdeed." Of (1) and (3), we saw that such a condition is inevitable in F's environment. For a person to live like that and not be affected by it at all is not general experience, and Shakespeare would not contradict general experience. Of (2) we might say that Falstaff is punished sufficiently by being made to live in such conditions. Shakespeare wanted a free field for the exercise of Falstaff's humour and he yielded sufficiently to his critics' moral demand when he put him down to be the companion of low fellows. Let us also remember that while Falstaff does many things "wicked", he does them only among men and women who do not care to judge him by any severe standards, and that Falstaff has not played the villain with saints and heroes. To punish him again was to check the ebullition of his humour, and Shakespeare was

doing his best to make him flow freely out like a fountain. As to (4), we found that in the case of F it was inevitable that he should have a reputation for cowardice and courage at the same time, and we are not surprised that Falstaff should also be like that. Of (5) we may remark that Shakespeare was writing for men and the children of men. And really, again, we are free to condemn Falstaff, to abhor him. If we do not, the mistake, one should think, lies with ourselves rather than with Shakespeare. Who knows if there may not be a streak of pure cussedness in even the best of us?

But all these difficulties vanish on the basis of the theory of humour explained here. Falstaff does not present any inconsistency if we take him as the embodiment of humour—of humour whose true nature it has been so far my attempt to explain. And I suggest that Shakespeare, though he has not given us a theory of humour, knew the truth about humour, and in Falstaff he was presenting to us that Truth rather than anything else. It has been maintained by some that in Falstaff Shakespeare has given us a view of the world, complementary to that represented by Hamlet. Whatever this latter might be, I repeat that Shakespeare was giving us in Falstaff a striking embodiment of the real truth about humour, and as such it is a perfect work of art. An instinct giving rise to purposive

activity may get thwarted in three ways, (1) It may get short-circuited into laughter; (2) It may rebel against the obstacle and get broken up, bringing destruction on the organism itself; (3) It may struggle and struggle and in some way, excluding destruction, in some measure attain its object and peace. I suggest that in Falstaff Shakespeare has given us a picture of the first,<sup>1</sup> in his tragedies a picture of the second, and in his last plays a picture of the third alternative. It is in the nature of things that the first alternative should give scope only for a single play while the two latter should tap the fertility of his skill and genius to a much larger extent.

Falstaff is unique and has been inimitable. But in recent times a great French writer has given us a close approximation of him. M. Anatole France possessed one of the finest intellects known to literature, and his Abbé Coignard challenges comparison with Falstaff. One would not be exaggerating if one said that in

<sup>1</sup> I do not include *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The story goes that Shakespeare wrote it to please the Queen, who wished to see Falstaff in love. A Dr. Johnson, in the eighteenth century, did not choose to bandy civilities with his Sovereign, and he was full of common sense. If, then, in the age of Sidney and Raleigh, a Shakespeare humoured his Queen, instead of trying to convince her of the psychological impossibility of the feat set to him, so much the wiser he—and the story could be true. Critics have found the play decidedly inferior, and the Shallow scenes greater in interest than the amorous episodes of Falstaff.

l'Abbé Coignard M. France was giving the world his own characteristic edition of the English Falstaff, for, in fact, the only main difference between Sir John and the Abbé is that the Abbé has erudition and is capable of the philosophic irony of his creator. But this is not a difference in essentials. Anatole France was not deliberately imitating Shakespeare. He also knew the truth about humour, only in conceiving the character he thought it fit to present him in the garb of a learned Abbé. He had his own reasons for this, for, unlike Shakespeare, who emphasized humour as a dissolvent of action, Anatole France emphasized humour as a dissolvent of opinions, and particularly, as in this instance, religious opinions. This accounts for the Abbé's philosophical irony as well. For the rest, there is no feature in Sir John which is not characteristic of the Abbé also. And it is significant to note that Shakespeare never makes Falstaff speak in verse. Steady and deep and continuous emotion, the motive of poetical self-expression, is necessarily inconsistent with humour, and Falstaff uses only prose. Reflection is necessary for a great humorist and the Abbé is made out a philosopher. How suggestive again of the seriousness of their convictions that both Shakespeare and France should have invested their creations with a halo of pathetic glory when they removed them from the stage of existence. Falstaff and the Abbé were not



intended merely to provoke an idle laugh; in them their authors sought to give us a great psychological truth.

We might consider an example or two more of instances of humour in literature. I shall depend on Bain for my choice of them.

(i) (a) "Pantagruel having first implored the aid of the Great God, his Preserver, and made public prayer in fervent devotion, by the advice of the Pilot held firmly to the mast. Friar John was stripped to the shirt to help the sailors; so also were Episteinon, Pono-crates, and the rest; Panurge alone sat on the deck weeping and lamenting. Friar John, seeing him, cried out, 'By the Lord! Panurge the calf; Panurge the blubberer; Panurge the coward; you would do much better to help us here than to sit there crying like a cow!' 'Be, be, be, bous, bous, bous,' replied Panurge. 'Friar John, my friend, my good father, I drown—my friend, I drown. It is all over with me, my spiritual father, my friend—it is all over. The water has got into my shoes by way of my collar. Bous, bous, bous, paisch, hu, hu, hu! I drown! Bebe, bous, bous, bobous, bobous, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! Zalas! zalas! now I am like a forked tree, with my heels up and my head down. Would to God that I were now in the ark of those blessed fathers whom we met this morning, so devout, so fat, so joyous, and so full of grace. Holos, holos,

holos, zalas, zalas! this wave of all the devils (*meta culpa Deus*)—I mean this wave of the Lord—will overwhelm our ship. Zalas! Friar John, confession. Here I am on my knees. *Confiteor*, your sacred benediction! 'Thousand devils!' cried Friar John. 'Do not let us swear,' said Panurge, 'to-morrow as much as you please'."

(b) "I sink; I die, my friends. I die in charity with all the world. Farewell. Bous, bous, bousowwanwaus. St. Michael! St. Nicholas! now or never. Deliver me from this danger, and I here make a solemn vow to build ynu a fine large little chapel nr two between Condé and Monsoreau where neither cow nor calf shall feed. Oh, nh! pailfuls are getting down my throat—bous, bous. How devilish bitter and salt it is! oh, you sinned just now, Friar John, you did indeed; you sinned when you swore; think of that, my former crony! Former, I say, because it is all over with us; with you as well as with me. Oh, I sink, I sink. Oh, to be but once again on dry ground; never mind how or in what condition; oh, if I was but on firm land with somebody kicking me."

Of Rabelais, Bain says that he is more a genius than an artist. This judgment does not concern us here. But of the first passage Bain's remark is, "The delight in chuckling over a coward is luxuriously provided by the author's splendid invention of circumstances in

the picture of a storm at sea"; of the second, "The timidity of Panurge is only equalled by his hypocrisy and meanness." We certainly chuckle over the coward and the mean hypocrite, but is that all? That Panurge is a coward and hypocrite does hardly explain why we laugh. Rabelais, with a true sense of humour, has given us some effective contrasts that tickle. Still, one should think that a complete explanation of the passage could be possible only if we recognized that Rabelais has endowed Panurge himself with a lively sense of humour. There is also a subtle contrast suggested to us between Panurge's "sense of humour" and his fear in conflict with each other. His fear is great, but not strong enough to stifle his sense of humour.

Comparing Panurge with Falstaff, one important difference stands out. If a keen sense of humour determined a person's conduct entirely, as in Falstaff, we saw that he would then at times be the victim of self-delusion which, in Falstaff's case, however, was easily and quickly dissolved in his humour itself. In Panurge there is self-delusion, but his humour is not strong enough to dissolve it. Panurge's fears are stronger, and to this extent the conception is inferior to that of Falstaff, and Shakespeare by so much the superior artist and psychologist.

We can now easily understand why Bain should go to the length of saying that "as a purer specimen of

genuine humour we may now refer to Don Quixote". When Bain speaks of purity he is involved in moral prepossessions. These have no place in a scientific analysis, and we are forced to conclude that Shakespeare's humour, as embodied in Falstaff, is as pure, true, and rich as humour ever can be. In Falstaff Shakespeare has sought to give us not only a humorous character, but to embody also the psychological truth about humour. Cervantes had undoubtedly a rich and lively sense of humour, but Don Quixote is *not* a humorous character. He provided many occasions for us to laugh, but he has no humour himself. He is the victim of self-delusion, and humour is its foe. It is through his self-delusion that he induces our laughter. Cervantes' genius lies in the vivification of such a character, and in the invention of the circumstances wherein such a character is to play. With all his impressiveness, Don Quixote strikes us as rather unnatural and exaggerated. Falstaff is also unnatural and exaggerated, but he never impresses us like that. The one is an antithesis of the other. While Falstaff always seeks to make use of such an outlet as humour provides for self-expression, Don Quixote *never* once does so. An absolute closure of the outlet may be possible, but it is *not* so probable in real life, except in the regions of psychopathology, or psychology of the abnormal. To say Don Quixote is *not* humorous is

not to deny that the book *Don Quixote* is humorous. Cervantes' genius was limited, and the difference between him and Shakespeare may be expressed thus: while both had a strong sense of humour, Shakespeare knew in addition the truth about psychology of humour as well, of which Cervantes seems to be ignorant. It might be objected that there is nothing on record to show that Cervantes did not know the psychology of humour; but then he has not given us a character like Falstaff which embodies that truth. We judge an artist's work by his Art; and Falstaff is the touchstone of true humour.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Particular forms of Humour—Vituperations, Satire, Wit, Pun, Irony—Humour and Comedy*

It remains for us to consider some of those forms of humour so-called—"vituperation", "ridicule", "satire", "sarcasm", and "wit".

Bain has spoken of our delight in malignity, and "appetite for the infliction of suffering", and, earlier than Bain, the Frenchman La Rochefoucauld remarked that we experience a sort of pleasure in the sufferings of even those who are dearest to us. Bain differs from the French epigrammatist only in the apparent "scientific air" with which he says things. It does not come in here that we should discuss the truth of these statements. But it has to be pointed out that Bain confuses issues when he identifies delight in suffering with our delight in reading an effective description of suffering. Life is confused with its literary representation. The so-called delight "in malignity", which Bain mentions, is only our satisfaction of the sense of humour in the face of a work of art.

"Vituperation" Bain excludes from "humour". This need not be. Judged in reference to the vituperator, it is more an expression of his anger. He is

just abusing another, finding a vent for his pent-up anger. But the reader's delight in it springs from different causes. It is not the satisfaction of hearing another abused, as at a street row. He does not sympathize with the writer to the extent of feeling exactly like him. The distance between himself and the writer is all the greater when the object of the vituperation does not rouse his interest. The interest which a reader feels to-day in the *Letters of Junius* is certainly not the kind of interest and satisfaction which Junius felt in writing and publishing them, or his contemporaries felt in reading them. There is, again, a difference when a person reads his favourite Daily's attack on a publication of the opposite school. In this case, one is not feeling differently from the writer of the article. It is apparent that between these two cases there is a difference in standards of judgment. With regard to an article in to-day's newspaper, one judges too personally; with regard to the *Letters of Junius* one's judgment is more literary. And any satisfaction that we feel is due to the sense of humour that we possess; though it is true that humour is possible for us because we do not feel like Junius or his contemporaries.

"Vituperation" and "ridicule" differ from each other. The former is a simple and direct expression of anger; the latter expresses anger with a consciousness of superiority and an element of humour in it.

The reader's delight in these is due mainly to his own possession of a sense of humour. Satire is distinguished from ridicule and sarcasm only in the proportion in which these various elements of pride, anger, and humour are mixed together. A rigid definition is difficult, but it can be suggested that true satire is found where there is more humour, less anger, and least personal superiority. The mixture depends on the writer himself. Where a pleasant mixture has been achieved, we extol the writer as a great and gentle satirist. We do not mind, we shall in fact be all the more pleased, if he should reveal more humour and kindness than anger. In this case we are in doubt as to whether we shall call him a humorist or a satirist. In the case of the great satirists whom we have acknowledged to be so by critical tradition, this difficulty has arisen. It is clear why this should be so. And when a writer is less kindly and humorous than satirical, he is unhesitatingly dubbed gloomy or cynical. In proportion as his sense of superiority is felt to be less we sympathize with him more, for otherwise he is apt to rouse our resentment at his sense of superiority, and this is to interfere with the effect of his writings. In these respects, Thackeray, Pope, and Swift offer striking illustration.

The definition of wit is made more difficult by the fact that most critics disagree as to whether they



## PARTICULAR FORMS OF HUMOUR

in restricting the term wit to such forms of humour which are conditioned by remoteness of experience and economy of words. An "epigram" would differ from "wit" by not necessarily observing the former condition. Remoteness of experience would necessarily lead to ingenuity as a general feature of wit, so much so that a person always seeks the ingenious and the remote when he wants to be witty. Implying incongruity of perceptions it is humour, but, limited in its formal application by other circumstances, it is distinguished from other types of humour. The distinction that is usually made between "wit" and "humour" is artificial and baseless, and misunderstands the nature of both, while helplessly forced to acknowledge interrelation. The truth has been already stated, and we are not surprised that wit should at times provoke more laughter, as distinct from smiles, than is convenient for the classifying critic. It depends on him who listens, on the mental background which he possesses. If the incongruous ideas roused in him are of strong effect he must laugh, though generally, when the wit is more ingenious, the experience touched more remote, the chances of downright laughter are less.

Bain's observation that in the case of the pun the humour is due to the plurality of the meanings is true. It is enough for us to recognize that even puns are humorous in proportion to the nature of the incon-

gruity they convey to the listener. But the pun has been regarded as an inferior type of humour, because of the facility with which it can be made. The facility, again, is not always the fault of the author of the pun; it is a matter of the language. Nevertheless there is no reason why every instance of pun should be condemned as an instance of inferior humour. Here also there is scope for the exercise of genius. To choose but one example, quoted by Bain, "one of Jerrold's well-known witticisms was directed against an objectionable person who said of a certain musical air that 'he was quite carried away by it'. 'Is there anyone here that can whistle it?' was the remark." It is easy to say this is an inferior instance of humour, for it is a pun on the words "carried away", but it is very difficult for most people to have thought of at the time. Alertness of mind is not easily acquired. The pun has attained this degradation because the familiar always tends to lose its dignity.

Irony is really a form of ridicule or satire, but differs from it in that the writer affects an impartiality in judgment, and that the contrast is more suggested and implied than avowed and explicit. The subtlest kind of irony is thus often characterized by an urbanity of suggestiveness which other forms of humour lack. The advantages are clear. Irony is more effective in convincing a reader. It softens the writer's conceit in

his eyes, and in dealing with controversial subjects this is a great advantage. Among modern writers Anatole France used it consistently and effectively, and he used it to test the truth of opinions. Because they were serious opinions, some of them not merely opinions but indisputable truths in the eyes of their holders, irony in these instances was described as philosophic irony. Dramatic irony, again, is only another instance of the use to which irony is put, and does not differ in essence from irony as generally understood.

We shall now take up the relation of Humour and Comedy. Humour no doubt, may be used in tragedy, and this is supported by the practice of great writers; but what marks out comedy as separate in its relation to humour?

Let us first ask ourselves if humour as such is capable of creating a comedy as we conceive it to be. Imagine a number of Falstafs in varying degrees acting and reacting on one another with none else interfering. Would that be a comedy? We shall certainly get plenty of occasions for laughter. If a play of this sort can be written at all, there is no reason why it should not be called a comedy. But it does not seem to be possible; at any rate even Shakespeare was content to give us but one Falstaff. This is because we saw, as in the case of Falstaff, humour is a dis-

solvent of action, and in comedy we want action. There is bound to be, then, in comedy, a mixture of humour and something which is not humour. Comedy should have a light and laughing aspect, as well as a more serious aspect. The former is self-sufficient and does not require to be resolved, but the serious side of the conflict demands resolution. However, the latter is often subordinated in interest to the former, or, in other words, when humour determines the tone of the play in a decisive and distinctive manner we have a comedy.

But the writer may also treat the serious aspect very seriously without the predominant tone being affected. The comedy may be more "sober" in tone; it may be even tragi-comedy. In any case the writer does not introduce death, for death, ordinarily unable to make us laugh, has been ruled out of comedy as injurious to its tone, whatever other misery or sorrow may be introduced. Where death is at times introduced in a manner that does not cast a great gloom on us, it would be difficult to say whether a particular work is a tragedy or a tragi-comedy or comedy. Thackeray's *The Newcomes* is variously spoken of as a tragedy or tragi-comedy. Think again of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* or *Measure for Measure*, where death does not actually occur on the stage. How difficult critics find it to classify them as comedy or tragedy!

Humour, determining the tone of a play, determines the scope and nature of the subject-matter also for a writer. He is hampered again by the necessity of giving a verisimilitude to his story if he wants to make it realistic. A writer may be content, however, to give us only convincing characters, or a convincing story, or he may give us both—all, of course, determined in accord with the demands of humour. We may have thus serious comedies, satirical comedies, romantic comedies, and farces, etc. The distinction between these is not one based on humour. These types are a mixture of humour, truth, idealism, and other things in various degrees, but all alike in that they possess a distinctly humorous tone.

It is necessary to discuss, in passing, the particular use of comedy as a "social discipline". The "comic muse" may be able to carry out this noble measure, but let her have no illusions on the matter. If we subject ourselves to her lashing we do so of our own accord, and the discipline is obtained through ourselves, through our enriched sense of humour which grows stronger with increased exercise, with increased experience. Here, again, the confusion between Life and Literature has led to the clouding of agreement among critics. In life, discipline is often obtained in a different way. More often than not, it is forced on the individual. A person

is made to behave properly more or less by circumstances against his will. His own sympathy and common sense also enable him to strike out a line of conduct for himself. "He finds not satisfaction in conduct that is displeasing to those about him, but finds it in conduct that pleases them, even though it be such as would otherwise be distasteful, repugnant or painful to himself. He finds in the praise of his fellows evidence that his emotions are shared by them, and their blame or disapproval makes him experience the pain of isolation. To many children this sense of isolation, of being cut off from the habitual fellowship of feeling and emotion, is no doubt the source of the severe pain of punishment; and moral disapproval, even though not formally expressed, soon begins to give them this painful sense of isolation; while approval gratifies the impulse of active sympathy and makes them feel at one with their fellows. And as their social circle widens more and more, the approval and disapproval of each wider circle give greater zest to their relation and a deeper pain to their shame, and are therefore more eagerly sought after or shunned in virtue of this impulse of active sympathy." This discipline of life is quite different from the discipline of comedy. The comic muse can only help us through ourselves, through the sense of humour we have. Comedy should not be content to hold the mirror up

to us; it should also make us see. But can it? The sight depends on us. Where we are willing to see and understand, comedy is capable of social discipline, but to say that "laughter is given us as a means of effective social discipline" is as true as saying that the sex instinct was given to A, B, and C so that they might happily marry the girls D, E, and F before a registrar or a priest!

We recognized that "laughter" was essentially subjective and that we do not laugh because a thing is "ridiculous" in itself. We have, then, to ask what is the "ridiculous"? The simple truth is either that there is nothing ridiculous, or that everything is ridiculous. McDougall clinched the matter when he said, "In inventing laughter, Nature created the ridiculous". We have seen how this was so. But certainly among objects for convenience' sake we have come to regard some as "ridiculous", some as "ugly", some as "beautiful," and so on. What, it is not altogether idle to ask, is then the exact significance of these epithets? Well, they are so many epithets which we apply to objects according as they affect us. They are the judgments which we pass on them when we have been stimulated in a particular manner. A thing, we say, is ridiculous when it stimulates our sense of humour and rouses our contempt at the same time. Contempt, McDougall suggests, is a "derived emotion", a "binary compound of disgust and positive self-feeling". Hence a sense of humour, a sense of superiority and aversion, have all to be stirred in us in more or less degrees of strength

*Ugliness and Beauty—The meanings of the terms—Relation to Art—Art and Science—Value of Criticism*



if we are to call an object ridiculous; and the ridiculousness of the object depends on the strength of the feelings roused.

Between the ridiculous and the "ugly" there is only a difference in degree. When, in the compound emotion, the feeling of disgust predominates over the other two, then we describe the object as "ugly". There are varying degrees in "ugliness" even as in the ridiculous. But this depends on the occasion and the individual who passes the judgment. Ridiculousness and ugliness are essentially a subjective experience, and in reference to objects, they are only the expression of our feelings in their presence. It is certainly possible for us to give "reasons" for these feelings, but the possibility is due to the ingredient "sense of humour". The "ugly" we may define only as that which jars on our sense of the fitness of things, of their nature, and of their relations to one another, and which *also* causes loathing and aversion in us.

Beauty is likewise subjective, and it is equally a judgment which we pass on objects when they affect us in a particular manner. Beauty is what fits in harmoniously with our experiences. That which stirs our sentiments without giving rise to incongruous impulses is what is beautiful. But to stir a sentiment is to rouse impulses. These impulses are directed towards the object, because the object is a stimulant and the

impulses will be satisfied only in union with the object. Beauty then "pleases" and engenders desires. Beauty is desired. Intellectually considered, without forgetting that every "idea" is really an instinctive experience, we may define beauty as that which fits in most harmoniously with the context of our experiences and ideas, with our sense of the fitness of things and their relations to one another, or sense of proportion. To regard beauty as anything else is to invite contradictions. To the Central African, his "girl" is as beautiful as the European girl is to a European. To say that the Negro has no sense of beauty while the European has is no more true than to say that the Negro is less human than the European.

If beauty and ugliness are thus subjective, if the "beautiful" and the "ugly" are only intellectual judgments on a subjective experience, what is their relation to Art? Art has been often defined as dealing with the beautiful. This mistaken view is based on a narrow and objective conception of the nature of the beautiful. Art comprehends the beautiful and the ugly inasmuch as the "human" does, for Art is frankly self-expression in ways other than the natural and legitimate action in which an instinct usually manifests itself. Besides, in confining Art to the "beautiful" alone there is implicit yet another confusion. Take Caliban, for instance. He is a monster, repulsive, the

incarnation of ugliness; yet as a conception, as a piece of artistic creation, he is admirable. When we speak of Caliban as ugly we are judging him in relation to ourselves; when we admire him, we are viewing him as a product of Shakespeare's imagination and comparing him with other similar expressions of genius. The two judgments involve two different mental view-points. Often the change from the one into the other is not realized by us, and our critical judgments show a corresponding confusion. The common talk about Art, its scope and nature, its different types, Romance, Realism, and Idealism, the large differences of opinions which it involves, the difficulty of reconciliation of these—all these reveal that the common conception has not touched truth and would therefore require looking into.

We have to begin from the beginning. The statement "fire burns" is an expression of experience. This experience involves two elements—ourselves and fire, the subject and the object. It is possible accordingly to express it with more or less emphasis in reference to one or the other. In communicating an experience, there are thus two ways possible, each implying a different standpoint and emphasis: a personal and subjective, and an impersonal and objective. In the former case the personal element is the determinant of interest; and in the latter case the object. On the basis of this

distinction there are two large divisions, to one or the other of which all communication of experience can be made to belong. Broadly speaking, the two divisions may be classed as "Art" and "Science".

Experience is the same, but in the communication of it to another, it may be presented from two different sides. Art and Science thus differ, without being necessarily antithetic to each other. We are not concerned here with the metaphysical discussion whether an object exists independent of our consciousness of it, whether it has qualities apart from our knowledge of it. It may or may not have; but we might recognize that all experience is possible for us only because and in so far as we exist. We experience. The distinction between Science and Art exists only on a basis which is relevant to our experience. The two are not fundamentally opposed to each other. Art is the direct expression of personal experience, and because it is so and because we are ever ready to be sympathetically stirred in witnessing another's experience, its appeal is stronger and more emotional. Because of the complexity of a personality, art is also more complex. Science, on the other hand, is the expression of a general experience—individual experiences divested of the personal element to the largest extent possible, so that they may be made to resemble more and more the common factor in all human experiences, leaving, of

course, the common human element. Art has to do with individual experience; Science ignores the individual and thinks only of the similarity in individual experiences. While the appeal of Art is thus to the complex nature in us, the appeal of science is restricted to the single instinct of curiosity. Art, having directly to do with the person and his experience, is concrete, while in Science a process of abstraction has taken place. And because abstraction is the second stage in thinking, Art is born earlier than Science. Both deal with the truth of human experience. But Science, communicating this, seeks to establish a *continuity and consistency* between the experiences of individuals, while Art insists on a consistency of experience only with regard to the single individual who communicates his experience. It is true that a knowledge of the larger continuity and consistency involved in Science must react on the individual Artist; but Truth in either case is not fundamentally different. One would think this was what Keats meant when he gave expression to his feeling that Beauty is Truth and Truth is Beauty.

The cultivation of personality and sincerity is then essential in Art, and its appeal and force depends on this. Where this is present to a remarkable degree, its impressiveness is beyond question. It is because of this we say Art is so much more human than Science.

The power of Art is the power of personality, and Art is thus essentially subjective in its origin and in its appeal. Its morality is not the usual morality of our social conduct. No doubt the artist would reflect this social morality more or less in the expression of his reactions to it, but it is not his business to preach or prophesy. His *motive* is self-expression through the one means which he has chosen for himself or been forced to choose—a means which, however, is different from the usual means of satisfaction, sought by our instincts. In order to attain this self-expression, it is as much the artist's interest as his public's that he should be true to himself, consistent with himself, sincere. Insincerity blocks his own motive and destroys his justification for seeking a means of expression which he is unfitted to utilize. Sincerity is the only morality we may, then, predicate of Art. The artist tells us his own feelings, his own thoughts, his experiences *as they have been experienced by himself*. The poet in Matthew Arnold perceived this truth when he wrote his noble sonnet on Shakespeare; and Cellini, the Italian murderer, adhered to this condition in writing his Autobiography. When an artist violates this condition, deliberately or through unconscious self-deception, we know it. We know it through our feelings: we know it in the sudden jar to our feelings and we can express the knowledge with a degree of accuracy that will be dependent on

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our own introspective habits, or our capacity to read our feelings aright.

People often speak of "tendencies",—the tendency of a work of Art to produce this result or that. The only tendency which a work of Art can be reasonably expected to possess is that it should help us towards a clearer self-expression for ourselves if need be, for an artist's responsibility towards us is over if he has succeeded in clearly communicating to us what he has himself experienced. Dealing as he does only with his own personal experience, it is unreasonable that he should be demanded to offer us guidance. We may profit by his experience or not, but the responsibility of such a guidance is not his. And an artist is forgetting the limits of his true function in relation to society when he offers to preach and propagandize. When he does so he is challenging us, and we may accept the challenge or not. Direct inducements to a course of action do not belong to the province of Art. Art may modify us through ourselves, but this is quite a different matter. An artist may seek to persuade us only through himself.

Any relevant criticism of Art would, then, be confined to the sincerity and personality of the Artist. The originality of the artist does not lie altogether in the new truths which he may abstract or discover. His originality is implicit in the fact of his being a different

individual, in the consequent difference of his experiences. But if he could add to this originality a deeper and subtler sense of truth in general, a sensitive, delicate, and intuitive perception of it, he is certainly all the greater for it. And criticism must take into account this intuition of the artist's.

Objective standards may be to some extent possible of application in critical judgment. Criticism may certainly draw from objective knowledge such as Science furnishes, or such as itself gathers from a contemplation of the works of great artists in general, in order to check and verify its experience in the presence of a particular example. Such a knowledge would furnish a critic with standards of a sort; tentative and never to be rigidly followed. But when all is said, there is the distinctive peculiarity of Art—the personality of the artist, individual, different, and stimulating. This is elusive and subtle, and can only be felt and never accurately measured nor fully communicable to another. No rigid laws can, accordingly, be made to help a critic in his valuation and judgment. When every available standard has been used, he has still to fall back on himself, analyse his own inward experience, if he is to attain a fuller comprehension. Knowledge undoubtedly helps, but ultimately his own capacity for sympathy and emotional reaction are the most important, and often the only, basis for him to go



upon. His appreciation is as much a measure of himself as a valuation of the Art which he seeks to judge. And the distinction between objective and subjective criticism, the demand that all standards are objective and must be possible, when insisted on rigorously will but tend to increase confusion.

By its very nature, accordingly, criticism is a later growth than Art. Criticism in regard to Art is the symbol of a growing scientific spirit in relation to Art. It implies an abstract consideration of Art as Art. Nevertheless, it has its own title to be considered as a genuine Art by itself, inasmuch as it is also ultimately personal and subjective, though it differs from Art in general in an important manner. While Art has to do directly with Life, the artist's experiences of life, criticism is more concerned with the "critic's" experiences in relation to a work of Art, though he might interweave into them relevant portions from a more direct knowledge of life. But the distinction, though convenient, is not fundamental. The truth was nobly expressed when Anatole France said: "On the whole criticism is of value only through him who writes it, and the most personal is the most interesting. Criticism is, like Philosophy and History, a sort of romance designed for those who have sagacious and curious minds, and every romance is, rightly taken, an autobiography. The good critic is he who relates the

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adventures of his soul among masterpieces." And elsewhere, with equally wise insistence, he remarks: "I believe I have already said that there is no objective criticism any more than there is any objective art, and all those who flatter themselves that they put anything but themselves into their work are dupes of the most fallacious philosophy. The truth is that we can never get outside ourselves."

## CHAPTER IX

*The Psychology of Tears—The Nature of Sorrow—  
Pleasure and Interest—Our Feelings at the sight of Suffering—  
The Matter of Tragedy—The Tragic Hero—Fate and  
Tragedy—The Feelings of Pity and Awe*

"Tears" has been a comparatively simple problem with psychologists. Unlike "laughter", it does not involve a dual psychological process. There are indeed various kinds of tears, such as the tears of gratitude, of joy, of pain, of anger, and of grief, but the psychology behind is the same in all cases. There is general agreement among psychologists that "tears" is a very natural psychophysical phenomenon, and an attendant sense of relief is one of its distinctive features. But "tears" are not the cause of relief; relief comes with tears.

Weeping is a mode of relief, in fact, a mode of emotional expression, a natural outlet in certain cases of unbearable tension. In this it is like laughter, and arises when an instinct is stirred to the necessary degree. Generally speaking, in thwarted conation laughter or tears may arise according to the way in which a person is affected, and according to the nature of his inward equipment. But we have seen that laughter arises sometimes in successful conation; so also tears may

arise: such are the tears of joy. There is a difference, however. Tears do not come so readily as laughter. They are a sign of intensity of emotion, while laughter may or may not have behind it any great degree of emotion. The difference is clearer when we consider the relation of either to sympathy. While sympathy can easily induce laughter, it does not so easily cause tears to flow. We have sympathy, and through sympathy our instincts are easily stirred to activity, but sympathy does not ordinarily arouse intense activity. Hence, while we readily laugh on account of our sympathy, we are not so prone to tears unless our sympathy has developed so strongly that we can identify ourselves almost completely with another. This is a more correct way of expressing the truth than, for example, Professor Baillie's way of putting it. He says: "To begin with we do not weep for other people's losses, but for our own, and only with developed social consciousness can we so assimilate ourselves to the situations in which other people find themselves as to weep for or with them. . . . Tears shed over the fate of pet animals is an extension of the same social consciousness." By "social consciousness" I suppose Baillie means "sympathy", and so far he is right. But it is unnecessary to load man with more selfishness than he actually possesses. It would be more precise to say that he does not weep over

another's misfortune because his sympathy is only inadequately developed. A man may weep over his own losses as well as another's. But it is doubtful if, in any person, sympathy is so strongly developed that he can weep as readily in an instance of another's grief as in his own. In the ordinary human being sympathy exists more or less and, in proportion to the strength of this, he weeps at another's losses more or less or not at all. But this is to recognize that a sympathetic stimulation of the instincts is feeblcr than the application of a direct stimulus, and as tears require deep feelings behind, sympathy fails to provoke tears as often as it otherwise might.

If emotional intensity is a necessary condition for tears, then it follows that whenever an instinct is sufficiently strongly stirred it may bring forth tears. But we are not concerned with such tears as are attendant on successful instinctive striving. We are concerned only with the tears of pain—of thwarted instinctive activity. When an instinctive activity is thwarted, our first feeling is one of "anger". We seek to remove the obstacle in our way before we can go further. We rebel against the opposition, we fight it. But the opposition is so strong as to call forth our utmost efforts against it, and this means that our instinct in that particular direction has the strongest urge. So long as we continue fighting, our feeling is

one of anger, and we continue fighting so long as we are hopeful of victory. But a moment arises when the recognition is forced on us that the opposition is too strong for us, that we are weak against it. It is a moment in the conflict when we experience the most intense pain. With the recognition of weakness we begin to relax our efforts, and tears may immediately flow, the liberated energy seeking this natural outlet of expression now that it is not being used up in the struggle as fully as it has been—this being Nature's provision in the organism for such an emergency, for it is a great fact that "hormic" energy once liberated cannot be reabsorbed. Tears may arise with the very first moment of relaxation, before we have given up *all* efforts. These instances we describe as "tears of anger". These are really tears which arise from a consciousness of our weakness, but which are still complicated by our unwillingness to recognize that we are losing. Thus we weep and fight. But the consciousness of our weakness may be strong and we give up the struggle. Tears would then flow profusely. In either case, the point to be noted is that tears arise not actually from pain but from pain combined with a sense of weakness and helplessness. This is an important fact to remember, for only thus can we explain why we do not weep in all cases of thwarted activity even where the instincts have been strongly

stirred. So long as we experience even a ray of hope, whether we give up the struggle for the time being or not, we cannot weep. But when the last hope disappears then is the time for tears to come. Tennyson recognized this when he wrote:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depths of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes  
In looking on the happy Autumn fields  
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Thinking of the past? That irrevocable past! And Time, who can stop its progress? Yet the desire is there: if the happy autumn fields could continue for ever! No, we are helpless against time, and tears alone, great Nature's motherly provision for her suffering children, can give us relief.

Tears relieve; that is, tears are the first sign that pain is being relieved somewhat. But there are other physiological features in relief besides tears. "Weeping" has its physical accompaniments just as "laughter". The identity of the two processes as a liberation of unused energy, of energy that cannot be used in the usual course of instinctive activity, may be seen in the peculiar relaxation of the facial muscles which is common to both. The lips are drawn back; the mouth is open; and there is "Voice". "Laughter" and "weeping" are the two aspects of the same process—

the two sides of the statue at the cross-roads in the old story—a psychophysical relaxation, a natural method of self-expression.

It may be observed, however, in passing that "Voice" has a more intimate connection with their release and relief than facial muscles. We may no doubt control "Voice" to some extent, but whether we do or not "Voice" does help relief. This is most clearly observable in the case of children, in whom control is not so developed as in the adults. Children do both, laugh and weep, aloud. It is in fact impossible for them to laugh or weep silently. And though elderly people can "weep" silently, when the emotion is sufficiently intense their control breaks to pieces and they, too, weep like children; they, too, sob and sob and blubber. But the "Voice" in a case of tears strikes our ears differently from that in a case of laughter. Speaking generally, one may observe that "Voice" is distinguished on occasions by the nature and quality of the emotion behind; in other words, every instinct has its characteristic vocal manner and timbre. Aristotle's remark that you could tell a person's character from his "Voice" was, one should think, based on accurate observation. From the "Voice" rose both speech and song. "In the beginning was the Word." But this is digression.

Do we shed tears every time a strong instinctive



activity is thwarted? *The answer is clearly "No".* To thwart an instinct is to experience pain, but pain, of itself, even when accompanied by a sense of helplessness, does not necessarily result in tears. Tears are a sign of relief, but they are the physical part of a psychophysical process—the relief of pain. Relief has to be induced from within us and along this particular line. Only then can tears flow. Till that is done, it is a state of intense pain—a state of "dull despair". Pain can be relieved by removing the obstacle which causes it and allowing the instinct to proceed unchecked towards its natural goal, or alternatively along this side line attended by tears. As in the case of laughter, however, other animals do not show much capacity for this relief through tears. Man would seem to be distinguished from the rest of his fellow-creatures, then, in this larger capacity for relief of unsatisfied instincts by "laughter" or "tears"—*larger* capacity and hence easily mistaken as "peculiar" to him.

Notice, however, that as in laughter, so in tears, the relief is accompanied by a sense of satisfaction. Mere pain, as such, cannot induce tears. Pain is relieved when satisfaction comes to us—though not along the natural course of the instinct. Relief is then characterized by a reconciliation of ourselves to the circumstances which have so mercilessly opposed us so far. We are reconciled, inwardly and consciously reconciled,

to the obstacles, but the obstacles are not removed. This is the situation in "tears".

Such a reconciliation has been possible for us because of our *privious* experiences, because our experiences have been organized into sentiments. As this capacity for sentiment-formation affected us in our larger capacity for laughter compared with the rest of animal creation, so it determines our larger capacity for "tears". The point is more clearly illustrated when we observe children and their ways of weeping and crying. Children, with their limited experience as compared with adults, are more difficult to console and comfort. In their case, we have to satisfy them more often by removing the obstacle which causes them pain, for, with experience limited, they cannot easily assimilate the necessary ideas of consolation which we offer them and the instinct is not yet sufficiently accustomed to leave the "main road" for this "by-path". The difficulty of consolation therefore necessarily becomes greater when we have to do with the very young folk. It is observable, and significant to observe, that infants only "cry" and do not "weep", and children, too, generally "cry" more often than they "weep"—while adults rarely "cry" but only "weep". The "cry" is accompanied by a *minimum* of tears. It is here that other animals resemble human beings most, for they too "cry" from pain. With

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infants, even when they "cry" for minutes together, the amount of tears shed is very little; with the growth of experience they learn to "weep"; they learn to reconcile themselves to the inevitable, they seek satisfaction on other lines than the successful achievement of what they strove for. It is also observable that when "crying" on account of some unsatisfied desire, the tears of a child begin to fall at the approach of a sympathetic parent. Children weep more beside their mother, in her bosom, than beside the father. From her sympathy the child begins to draw comfort, from her sympathy he gets the necessary consciousness of strength which has been weakened by his recent experience. There is some satisfaction that way, there is some relief, and tears flow. It is when you try to comfort a child that he weeps most, and this has led some to remark that children are difficult to deal with. Really, the child is being comforted when he weeps; the tears gradually end in sobs and the sleep of peace. The popular distinction between the two words "cry" and "weep" is, as we see, based on the perception of a real psychological distinction.

McDougall has rightly recognized that "sorrow" is not an "emotion", but a "sentiment". There is often a general lack of precision in the use of some of these words, as sorrow, grief, pain, and it is desirable that one should fix their meanings. At any rate I should

indicate the lines on which I have used them. The condition when an instinct is thwarted and unable to attain its natural goal, we call pain. Pain may be intense or not as the case may be. When it is intense and accompanied by a sense of impotence and helplessness, we call it "grief" or "despair". When the admission of other "interests" begins to modify the degree of pain or grief, we describe the state as one of sorrow. Sorrow, then, is decidedly a "sentiment". We may, to be precise, speak only of tears of sorrow, not tears of grief or pain or despair. They are incapable of producing tears, as they do not include a sense of relief. "Tears of despair" in particular is a contradiction in terms, and even in the popular conception despair is generally taken to be a condition when persons have no sense of even a possibility of relief. It is, however, right to speak of a "cry of despair", and the phrase is familiar enough.

Similarly there is confusion in the way in which the terms "interest" and "pleasure" are used. This has led many people to assert that we are cruel by nature because we are "interested" in another's suffering. They take it to mean we are "pleased" to see another suffer. "Interest" is not identical with "pleasure". But it has been assumed to be so, and from this has been inferred that we feel pleased in the infliction also of suffering. Bain thus makes the preposterous claim that

"any theory of the pleasure of Tragedy that leaves out men's disinterested delight in the infliction of suffering is unequal to the explanation of the phenomenon". Man is more unfortunate than the other animals in this respect—that he can malign himself! We need not make ourselves out to be more cruel than we actually are. If we are "interested" in suffering it is because we cannot help interesting ourselves in the affairs of our fellows. We are so constituted by the possession of a sympathetic nature. But we do not generally inflict suffering deliberately on others merely for the pleasure of seeing them suffer. The Caligulas and the Neros of the world do not represent humanity in general health; they are morbid and perverted, and belong as such only to the regions of psychopathology. For a fuller discussion of the meaning of the two terms I would refer the reader to McDougall's admirable analysis of them. I am content to state that we are "interested" in a thing when our instincts are stirred to activity, while "pleasure" should be applied to the satisfaction at the end of a successful instinctive activity. It is for convenience' sake desirable that we should thus distinguish the two terms: interest meaning the satisfaction *attendant on the course* of the smooth working of the instinctive activity towards its natural goal, and pleasure meaning the satisfaction at its *successful conclusion*. To remember this distinction is to

be no longer surprised to hear that we are "interested" in suffering. Our emotions are stirred and we are "interested".

But emotion is only the affective aspect of an instinctive process. When the instinctive activity is completed naturally we receive pleasure. Now it may be asked that, if our "interest" could be so roused by our sympathy, is it not natural that we should receive pleasure also at the end, in seeing suffering? Quite so. There is pleasure—provided of course the victim of the suffering receives pleasure. We look at a person experiencing pain; because of our sympathy for him, we are "interested" and we look on. But we are not "pleased". If, however, his pain is relieved and he is pleased, we may share the pleasure, but not otherwise. No doubt at times we should like to get away from the scene, remarking "Serve him right", and apparently not in the least sorry that he should suffer. If we do so, it is for quite another reason than that we are cruel by nature. Pleasure at another's pain is a sign of morbidity. The healthy mind is sympathetic.

The sight of mere pain or grief by itself is always distressing, and we are tempted to look away if we cannot help to relieve. Indeed, it often happens in some cases that the sight of a funeral procession spoils the whole day for a person. We are naturally averse to pain, whether it comes to us directly or through our

sympathies. When pain or grief is mixed with some amount of satisfaction and reconciliation and relief and so becomes sorrow, then the sight of it is better borne by us.

Besides, in witnessing an instance of suffering and sorrow, we are looking, as it were, through a veil—through the veil of consciousness that we are not ourselves the direct victims of so much misfortune. This also serves to modify the sentences of our distress.

Our pleasure in seeing a Tragedy is a complex feeling; the interest that we have in seeing the suffering, etc., and the satisfaction we derive in the skilful and effective representation of it on the stage. The former is natural enough, and there is nothing which need depress us about it, for its cause is not because we are cruel or malicious by nature. We speak of a Tragedy as distressing when it treats *artificial* suffering. The avoidance of too many deaths, of excessive bloodshed in a "play", is justly demanded by us as a very desirable condition. If our delight sprang from a malicious and cruel pleasure in the infliction of suffering for its own sake, then that Tragedy should be deemed greatest which presents two armies on the stage in brutal and bloody conflict with one another, or the march of a conquering army of cannibals through a peaceful country of old men, women, and children.

We may now ask what relation have pain, grief, and

sorrow to a "Tragedy" apart from the skill involved in an effective representation of them? A Comedy we defined as a "play in which the predominant note was determined by humour". A Tragedy we may similarly distinguish as a play whose predominant tone is determined by the fact that the subject matter is largely pain, grief, or sorrow. But we are averse from the sight of pain or grief of an unrelieved kind, and so if a dramatist treats of pain and grief, he should so treat it that in the end we are made to acquiesce in it, we are made to feel reconciled to the situation which has made such a painful impression on us. Suffering in which we cannot acquiesce, to which we cannot reconcile ourselves, we reject from our sight. A Tragedy should not leave us distressed. It may treat of the acutest, most poignant anguish, but in the end there should be possible for us a sense of satisfaction, a feeling of peace and restfulness. Where these two conditions are to be seen, we say that it is tragic, whether it be a play or a novel, reserving the name "Tragedy" to the play.

Grief and pain and sorrow are then the theme of a Tragedy. But there are different kinds of these, according as there are different instincts, and according as they are mildly or deeply stirred. It is usual to demand a high intensity of the emotions. The more intense the emotion stirred and the more intensely it



is stirred, the greater our pleasure and interest at the sight of its representation. But as to which particular instinct or instincts should be chosen, we cannot rigidly lay down a rule. It is nevertheless recognized that some instincts are generally stronger than others, e.g. the instincts of self-assertion and sex. And wise playwrights, with an eye to what would appeal most to their audience, have built their Tragedies out of materials supplied by these instincts and the sentiments formed on their basis, either separately or in complex relation. Theoretically speaking, other instincts also may furnish the material for a tragedy, but their appeal to us is admittedly weaker in that they occupy a comparatively weak position in the constitution of man. They are not, however, necessarily excluded from a tragedy. They probably lend their share to strengthen the effect. Besides, if the dramatist, dealing with man in his living complex nature, is to be true to life, he is bound to touch on them also at fewer or more points.

The great importance for man of a capacity for sentiment-formation lies in the fact that it enables the instincts to come into close and complex relation with one another. Man's nature has the chance of developing into a perfectly adjusted, well-developed system in which the various instincts act harmoniously together, to the advantage of all concerned, acting separately or in conjunction. This integration takes place, in more

or less degree, with regard to one or more or all the instincts, in every man. Where the fusion is accomplished in a remarkable degree we say the man has a personality. Personality is the harmonious integration of our mental capacities. The perfect personality may be difficult of attainment, but different degrees of fusion are possible to all, and on this fusion depends the strength of the personality, even as the strength of the cord rests more or less on the mutual relation of the fibres that go to make it up. The strength of a personality, again, is dependent also on the innate strength of the separate instincts. The most powerful personality is then that which has attained a complete integration of very powerful instincts. The other animals have suffered in their competition with man because they are weak in this matter of the organization of their internal resources. Man has triumphed over his enemies, in fact, by virtue of his "personality". Personality is strength.

The intensity of pain and grief is heightened where the instincts are strong and organized in relation to one another. Again, that which thwarts an instinct may, sometimes, be so strong that it "breaks" the instinct and so breaks up the organization itself. It follows that the most distressing example for us of another's suffering is when he is a powerfully organized personality and when he is made to suffer in a degree

that "disintegrates" him. The most affecting theme of Tragedy, then, is the disintegration of a powerful personality. Such a theme stirs us thoroughly.

What about Death as a subject for Tragedy? It is surely the most poignant fact of Life? But the painfulness of Death depends on the attendant circumstances. It is more dreaded before than painful when it comes. Often the source of pain is a sense of irreparable loss. But it does happen in life that Death is also welcomed as a relief. This means that there is in life a sort of suffering which is more intensely unbearable than death itself. Better to lose everything than to go on suffering, so that the very suffering, we hope, is thereby put an end to. In such cases, Death "cuts off erratic histories with a catastrophic dash". If one lingers through, "it may be only to attenuate life to an uninteresting meagreness through long years of wrinkle, neglect, and decay". Uninteresting and distressing to the beholder, we might add. In Death people often seek the peace which they cannot find in Life.

Besides, Death is the fact of a moment, and as such is incapable of sustaining the interest of a beholder through a whole play. But "circumstances leading to Death" may form a fit theme; and among "circumstances leading to Death" we found the steady disintegration of a personality through misfortune or

suffering as what appeals most. Death will come at the end, but the playwright uses Death only as a graceful event to give the story a neatness and finish. Death used otherwise has the effect of paining us still further. Such unrelieved pain leaves us distressed, but if death is used as a source of relief to the sufferer, we rise up somewhat reconciled within ourselves in the consciousness that there is an end even to the worst of misery. Tragedy, dealing as it does with sorrow and not with unrelieved pain, gives us only this relief. The relief we seek and get does not arise from profound philosophical reflections. These might come in on subsequent reflection, but if at the time the play ends we feel relieved it is from the simple consciousness that the suffering has all ended, and the victim has attained a peace which with all his faults he deserved. Kill the tragic hero, then: that would put him out of his misery; and we would also be relieved. The tragic Artist might thus use Death as a means of relief, and not as the last stroke of misfortune. And, indeed, this is the practice of the greatest of them all. So viewed, Death is an inevitable element in a great Tragedy; but its purpose is to relieve the victim in the only way in which he could be relieved, to offer us thereby the only possible relief, and to reconcile us to the story of what has seemed endless suffering—endless in its intensity and unbecarable-

ness—and to round off the tale with neatness and grace.

Now Aristotle has told us that our experience at the end of a Tragedy is not merely a sigh of intense relief, but a complex mental state including pity and fear. We should examine the truth of this statement, and this leads us to a consideration of the nature of the "tragic hero".

We saw that the "hero" should be a powerful personality. The power of his personality is due to the greater unification and integration of the instincts within himself; and where the basic instincts are strong in themselves, the power is correspondingly greater. He in whom both these conditions are found is necessarily superior to him who fulfils only one. This variety of the tragic hero we shall consider then as the highest possible.

A tragic poet may, however, make use of some other adventitious aids to heighten effect. The average man is impressed by titles and rank. Not long ago, one of the greatest of modern English statesmen remarked on the effect of high-sounding titles on popular imagination and frankly made that his excuse for demanding of Parliament that it should confer the title of Empress on Queen Victoria. And there is no reason why a tragic poet also may not similarly make his hero a prince or person of high rank. It stimulates

the imagination of his audience, and there is a peculiar appropriateness in formally distinguishing a "hero" who is already distinguished from the generality of mankind by the possession of a strongly developed personality.

But the tragic hero impresses us and his fate appeals to us through the fact of the sympathetic nature that we possess. And our emotions are strongly stirred because he is strongly affected. In this respect that tragic hero is the greatest who in his strength comprehends the measure of the average strength of mankind. To do so is at the same time to impress his greatness on the audience. We feel in his presence that we are decidedly lesser; we are overwhelmed by his personality. The spectacle of his suffering pains us intensely enough; and the utter helplessness of the man against the odds of fate provokes our tenderness and pity for him; while the consciousness of his colossal strength, strikes "awe" into us—"awe" rather than pure "fear". Aristotle spoke of fear because, deducing from the Greek practice, he was led to think of Tragedy as a heroic conflict against Fate. In such a conflict Fate is conceived as stronger, and the Greek tragedians strove to impress on the audience the terrible and pitiless strength of Fate. Man confronted with Fate like a lonely traveller opposed in his path by a hungry and roaring lion can feel only simple

fear and not awe, and Aristotle was right. But there is no reason to confine the subject matter of a tragedy to a conflict between Fate and man. It may be a conflict within himself. That Fate may be somewhere in the background pulling the strings is of not much relevance. In the actual spectacle of his sufferings, we are impressed by the might of the forces within him, and when we contemplate the strength of such and compare it to our own, it is a feeling of awe rather than fear. A huge mountain cloven across by lightning or volcanic eruption presents an awful sight, but the awe is derived from the colossal nature of what actually confronts us rather than from the contemplation of the strength of the stroke or eruption that was responsible for the cleavage. We think more of the magnitude of the victim and the disaster that has fallen upon it than of the strength of the agency at work to bring about such a disaster. The state of feeling at the end of a tragedy then might be one of pity and fear, or pity and awe, plus relief. In a sense, this sums up a distinction between the "Classical" and the Shakespearian tragedies. Though it might be difficult—and it is rather idle to speculate on it—to decide the superiority of the one or the other, the fact remains that the Shakespearian is more popular than the Classical. It is so, not because it is more romantic, but because we can easily and more fully sympathize

with the tragic hero when our attention is not distracted to a certain extent by the presence of a hostile Fate confronting him. With the Greek, the philosophical conception of a destiny or Fate was almost religious, even as it is so with most Oriental peoples to-day. But with the growth of Christianity in Europe, this idea declined in force or lost its religious colour, and it was well that it did so, for it enabled Shakespeare to give us a type of tragedy which has not been surpassed, which he could not have done if Destiny had popped up like King Charles's head! A decided literary gain. But this is not to deny to Shakespeare a possible belief in fate or destiny. He may or may not have believed in it. But he never brought it on the stage. At the most "Fate" was there only as a "prompter"; the audience saw very little of it though they might vaguely suspect its existence somewhere.



## CHAPTER X

### *The Shakespearian Practice: Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear*

The disintegration of a powerful personality in a manner that leaves us pitiful and awestricken is then the test, as we saw, of a great Tragedy. Is it possible, one might ask, to define the nature of the circumstances that bring about this disaster? The Greek thought that Fate was responsible for it, but there is no need to postulate a Fate. No definite law can, however, be laid down, for as it happens, the disaster of disintegration does not necessarily depend on the magnitude of external forces or circumstances. External circumstances affect different people differently, and it is a distinct gain in effect for the dramatist, if he could minimize the force of such, for attention will not be unnecessarily drawn to something else from the hero and his strength and struggle. It would be a greater gain if he could "place" the cause of the disaster in the hero himself, in some flaw or weakness of his, in some small hole in him through which the wedge might slowly and steadily be driven, for then interest and attention will be entirely *concentrated* on the hero himself. The superiority of this conception is clear.

The wedge once allowed to penetrate, however,

penetrates further and further, slowly or swiftly enough but steadily and inevitably, till the personality cracks or disintegrates with echoes of deep pain and the whole structure falls with a mighty or startling crash as might a giant tower or column. It is impossible for us to know why this should be so till our knowledge of the laws of the mind's working is fuller than it is now. For the present, we have to be content with noticing that the capacity for organization of sentiments in mental life involves the possibility of disorganization and disruption, that even the best-knit personalities might break up when hit on the right spot in the right manner. The hit may, to all outward appearance, even be gentle and trivial. (Something of the nature of this phenomenon may be conceived in reference to the analogous incident of well-built bridges being liable to crash down when soldiers are made to march over them in formation—they are made to proceed through in broken file.) The significance of this peculiarity of sentiments and personality-formation has not been sufficiently recognized, but it has been shown in Shakespeare's practice that the external circumstance which ensures a tragedy may be disproportunately small. It need be only a trifle, indeed. Critics have, however, argued from this fact that it is due the feeling of "awe" we experience at the end of a tragedy. This feeling, as shown above, springs

from different causes, and we might recognize that rarely do we rationalize our feelings at the end of a tragedy in the manner indicated. The sense of disproportion between "an apparent cause" and the "real effect" comes to us only on later reflection, but, even at that, the explanation is fallacious, for it fails to notice that the possibility of so much suffering is really implicit in the individual as he is. We are only confounding an occasion with the cause. We should rather measure the disaster through the sufferer, and not in relation to the external circumstance which occasions his suffering. Shakespeare realized this and has been content to "cause" a tragedy with a "trifle". The real "cause" and "consequence" are, in fact, bound up within the hero himself.

Let us apply the conception of tragedy as outlined here to some of Shakespeare's tragedies. To take *Romeo and Juliet* first. It is affecting, but not great. It does cause us intense pain; it leaves us with a pity for the victims; but it does not "awe" us; indeed it leaves us more pained than relieved. It is one of Shakespeare's very impressive tragedies, but not one of his greatest. To explain the inferiority as due to Shakespeare's own youth may be true enough, but it does not make clear where exactly the inferiority lies. This very touching play does not take first rank, for intrinsically it is incapable of attaining the necessary appeal. There is no

disintegration of personality herein, and the depths of human misery therefore are not adequately realized. Romeo and Juliet cannot indeed have suffered a disintegration, for they were at an age when they could not have been properly integrated. They are still boy and girl to us, and if circumstances had been more favourable they would have still "grown". No doubt they attained a certain unification of character in the very intensity of their love, but that is hardly the culmination of a natural and steady growth. Perhaps it is for this reason, and not because he had not found himself, that Shakespeare did not choose to "disintegrate" and make it all a tragedy of the type of *Othello* or *King Lear*. Or perhaps he was just expert-meaning. If Death by itself could make a tragedy, there can be no tragedy more thrilling and painful than that of *Romeo and Juliet*. But *Flameth*, or *Othello*, for example, is decidedly greater and more powerful than *Romeo and Juliet*. The fact is that while *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, a great tragedy, it is not the greatest kind of tragedy possible, because *Romeo and Juliet* are not yet "fused" into powerful personalities. Because of this not being so fused, (1) disintegration is not possible with the same potentiality of effect as otherwise might have been the case; (2) they do not impress us with such a great sense of power and superiority; (3) pity alone, then, and not pity and

"awe" or pity and "fear", is our feeling at the end of the play; (4) Death is in this case felt to be not so much relief as an additional misfortune and cause of pain. For these reasons, the play, while impressive, is Shakespeare's most painful tragedy.

But it did not take Shakespeare long to discover the truth about tragedy, if he had not already found it out. When we come to *Julius Cæsar* we find evidence of it. Cæsar does not lend himself to the treatment of disintegration, unless Shakespeare chose to violate history. But for obvious reasons Shakespeare did not care to commit any gross violation of history, or even other sources for that, particularly when it happened to concern a well-known character like Cæsar. The significant point is that in this play Brutus and not Cæsar is the "tragic hero". I am not suggesting that Shakespeare chose a wrong title for his play—an author is free enough, I should think, to call a play what he likes. If Shakespeare had intended Cæsar to be his "tragic hero" he would not have killed him in the middle of the play. Clearly Shakespeare did not believe in mere death, even if it be the death of a Cæsar, as constituting the essence of a tragedy. Brutus accordingly is worked out as the tragic hero. From the first he most rouses our sympathy, and to the last he gets it most. But in Brutus, again, no disintegration takes place. Older than Romeo, married, and talking the

wisdom of books, he is still "young", but old enough to have his personality practically set. And so far our interest in him is great, he stirs us deeply. But his personality is based on the artificial basis of self-control learned, not from experience, but from the precepts of Stoic philosophers, and his conduct in the play is determined by abstract republican ideas. A noble and upright philosopher, his nobility and uprightness stir our sympathy and admiration, but his philosophy leaves us cold. His simple words of affection to his wife at parting move us much more than his balanced speech in the Forum. Brutus in fact, while possessing a sufficiently unified character, does not impress us in any way as a very forceful personality. Hence he does not stir our emotions so profoundly as Shakespeare's later heroes. Our feelings at the end of the play are not the proper mixture of pity and awe. There is very little "awe" but that little is more than what is found in *Roméo and Juliet*. And, unlike *Roméo and Juliet*, death here strikes gracefully, cutting off one erratic history "with a catastrophic dash". In these two respects *Julius Caesar* is an advance on *Roméo and Juliet*, but not quite up to our demands in regard to a great tragedy. There is no disintegration. Brutus dies by his own hand because of the failure of his own plans, and in this he showed himself to be more a conventional Roman than the Stoic philosopher he claimed himself

to be. He was disappointed very keenly, his sense of honour and freedom affected adversely, but we can hardly say that his death was justified by a shattered heart. We should not have admired him the less if he had still persevered even though he should have had to develop his plans in exile.

Critics, however, have noted the mental conflict in Brutus, and according to the theory that mental conflict of some sort is the essence of a Shakespearian Tragedy, Brutus has been admitted to the circle of the great tragic heroes. The importance of mental conflict in regard to the tragedy has been overestimated, or rather its precise significance has not been made clear. Mental conflict is a characteristic of everyday life with every human being. The direct fulfilment of simple desires belongs to the experience of infancy; it becomes rarer as man grows older and his obligations to his fellows become clearer and more emphasized. Society and the rest of his environment thwart a man in a thousand ways when he stretches out his hand in the pursuit of his desires. But in most cases he resolves the conflict for himself or reconciles himself to the situation in some manner. Of mental conflict, then, in relation to tragedy, it may be said at once that it is the prelude to and sometimes the accompaniment of the disintegration mentioned as the chief characteristic of a tragedy. It is the *process of disintegration*, however,

that is the main source of interest. An experience hostile to the personality enters, and the thin end of the wedge is driven in. Steadily he is riven asunder and he totters and falls at last. Such an experience may be very subtle, or it may be a vast misfortune. Shakespeare has invariably in his greatest tragedies made it, the "enemy," a comparative mote in magnitude. Once the "enemy" is admitted, the man suffers from the hostile presence, and his whole being struggles as the eye struggles against the mote. With every attempt to get rid of it the pain is only increased. There is, in a general sense, a mental conflict, but the conflict is a sign of the disintegration that is taking place. There is no escape for the victim. And the disintegration has begun with the admission of the "enemy". Now, it might happen that the "enemy" gained admission with the consciousness of the victim, or otherwise. In former, he might make a struggle before it enters. In any case, the admission of the "enemy" against a man's will is like pouring acid into milk—it is the signal of the ruinous transformation of the original character of the tragic hero. Critics of Shakespearean tragedy have been content to regard "mental conflict" as different from and not rather identical with this disintegration itself, and to that extent have been imperfect in their analysis.

In Brutus, the "enemy" is not admitted against his



will and there is no disintegration. He revolves in his mind whether he should take part in the conspiracy against Cæsar. The idea of killing Cæsar is the "enemy" in this case. The "enemy" seeks to gain admission, but Brutus is on his guard. He struggles hard and the conflict is portrayed for us in his soliloquies. This is all, or most of the conflict in Brutus. Notice that the number of his soliloquies diminishes later, once he has made up his mind. And he has made up his mind, compromised with his "enemy", or reconciled himself to the situation in a manner that, he is convinced, is honourable to himself. He has reflected and found not so much an "enemy" as a friend, an honourable guest whom it was his moral duty to invite in. There is thus no longer any hostility, and the rest of his story is a story of personal disappointment. As a "tragic hero" failing thus to disintegrate, he is inferior in interest to, for example, Hamlet, and *Julius Cæsar* fails to take rank in Shakespeare's great quartet. But Shakespeare has taken a step forward.

Let us now turn to *Hamlet*. At once we are in the presence of a tragedy which satisfies all the conditions we have been insisting as necessary for a tragedy of the greatest type. But we are not seeking to establish a theory of Shakespearian Tragedy so much as to find out if the theory of tragedy as outlined here could

probably explain Shakespeare's great work. So one must be content to remark that what we have considered to be the true characteristic of a great tragedy is capable of being illustrated with reference to *Hamlet*, and I hope to show that only the theory here defined can give a satisfactory explanation of some of the "inconsistencies" in regard to *Hamlet*. As in the case of *Falstaff*, if our theory is right, *Hamlet* also cannot present inconsistencies. Inconsistencies always make one suspicious, and the divergences of critical opinion regarding *Hamlet* are so great as to occasion particular notice. It is only reasonable to expect that if critical ideas about Tragedy and tragic heroes have been quite soundly based on a true psychological knowledge, they should have led us to some measure of agreement about the essentials of *Hamlet's* character, unless we are prepared to say that Shakespeare has erred here. That they have not done so and thus failed to apply with any clearness in the case of one complex character like *Hamlet* is sufficient to raise suspicion regarding their truth and comprehensiveness. There must have been a hitch somewhere.

*Hamlet* is a powerful personality, to judge by one's own impression, or, what is more important for purposes of argument here, to judge by the consensus of others' opinions. And as a powerful personality his tragedy also should lie in disintegration. I maintain

that this is what has happened to him. Disintegration need not always involve a complete shattering into fragments. In Hamlet, his personality is as it were neatly cut into two parts *without power of reason*. There is the Hamlet which wants to carry out the ghost's behest, and there is the Hamlet which does not understand why he should do so. This division of his personality has not been clearly realized in the usual criticisms about him, or, when realized, its full significance and its relation to the nature of a Tragedy not recognized. Hence all the diversities of opinion as to whether Hamlet is really mad or only feigning madness, whether indecision or imagination brought about his tragedy. And apropos of madness, it has to be noted that psychology has yet to explain what exactly madness is. The word is good enough for ordinary occasions, but in analysis requiring precision its use is very much limited. Let us also remember how lawyers put forward a plea of "temporary insanity" on behalf of their clients.

Hamlet is imaginative, reflective. His powers of reflection, much stronger than those of an average person at his age—or at any age—have brought about an early organization of experiences, an early fusion or integration of his sentiments. But his personality was hardly fully set when he was confronted with an experience which was to test its strength and break it.

One feels that if Hamlet had been fortunate enough to stay on at the University some time longer, he would have grown stronger with experience and reflection, that he would have arrived at his own philosophy of life, a philosophy definite and strong enough to stand the crucial tests of critical experience, a philosophy which is the symbol of a well-knit personality. As it was, Shakespeare takes him just when his personality has attained integration but has not been sufficiently "cemented", has not had sufficient time to "set" hard. And the powerful "enemy" comes in the shape of a father's behest to carry out a vendetta. If this had happened later, we may be sure Hamlet would have solved the problem in quite a different way. He might perhaps not believe in ghosts, or he might decide that a ghost's words were not to be trusted; or he might kill Claudius at once and have no compunction about it. But he was too young, and the old ideas of morality and conduct which, given time, in all likelihood he would have melted and remoulded in the crucible of his own reflective mind have not been all of them examined with care. He was still "studying". He has not had time to think about them as satisfactorily as he should have liked to, and when he actually does so he cannot bring his whole mental vigour to bear, for this is now partly diverted into a definite and different channel of con-

duct. If he had only had time to fix his standards for himself, he would have easily applied them to this particular situation and taken a satisfactory measure of the circumstances. But he has already begun to drift along the current, and every time he pauses to think he is carried further and further away from the shore of a satisfactory solution. He is moved forward helplessly, but he is ever looking back in pain. He is the victim of two opposing impulses, both strongly fixed within himself, the one produced by his usual reflection and residing in that part of his self which has been adjusted and organized by reflection, the other fixed in him by his father's ghost and residing in those parts of himself which have not been affected by his reflection. It was indeed unfortunate that fate should have been so cruel as to strike him on his unguarded, unfortified side. But fate so strikes him; the "enemy" enters through his weaker side and resides there, gains a strong place from which it seeks to overwhelm his entire personality. The stronger and reflective side is now stirred to activity, and it seeks to dispel the intruder. But it cannot do so; it is strong enough, however, to prevent the "enemy" from advancing very quickly to take possession of the whole organism. If Hamlet had been unreflective generally, if his whole personality had fused according to a different standard, a standard which would not have raised his suspicions,

the course of the story would certainly have been different; or, again, if his standard had included the justice of immediate and unquestioning obedience to a father's behest in any case, he would have at once gone to the task, carried it out, and felt glad over it. But as it is, his reflective self, which has been accustomed to guide him, now finds itself challenged by the portions still not come within its control. It is as if a conqueror when engaged in the task of restoring order in the country which he has conquered should suddenly be attacked by a foe from outside. He does not want to give up his peaceful work but he must repel the invader. But the foe happens to be difficult to dislodge from the position of advantage which he has gained in the interior itself, and he is interfering with every plan of order, and remains invisible. This is Hamlet's condition. All his usual ideas are interfered with; but he does not know how. He has his useful plans for the peaceful restoration of his mental life, but every plan is going astray. With every fresh attempt another part gets disturbed until in the end the confusion becomes too strong. The ghost's definite injunction he accepts, unthinkingly, uncritically, unconsciously. It has created a very strong impulse contrary to his usual nature. That is to say, the "enemy" has been admitted into the stronghold, and with it disintegration begins, steadily and quickly

enough, and there is no more chance of a "whole" Hamlet. The disintegration has resulted in a dual division of his self, and one or other of these parts takes possession of him and controls his action. Sometimes they enter into conflict with one another, and all his soliloquies are an expression of this. They illustrate the conflict between the two disintegrated parts of his personality seeking to come into harmonious relation. The conflict is quite unlike the conflicts in Brutus's mind *before* he commits the murder. The conflict in Brutus is the necessary prelude to an adjustment; the conflict in Hamlet is the symbol of an incapacity for adjustment. If, then, Hamlet is disintegrated in this manner, can we wonder that his conduct should appear inconsistent to those who moved with him? Some of them considered him to be mad; all of them were pained at his condition. Now, as McDougall remarks, all disintegration of personality is a kind of abnormal mental condition, and sometimes it is identical with madness of a certain kind. It is no wonder then that Hamlet was considered "mad". Hamlet really was mad, but there was a method in his madness, as the shrewd old Polonius observed. Disintegration has *not* resulted in a random and manifold splitting of the personality; it is only dual; and within the limited influence of either Hamlet is consistent. There was thus more method in Hamlet's

madness than in madness as we ordinarily understand it. And Hamlet in this condition would have gone on, growing more and more intensely "mad", though not necessarily less methodically so, and he might have killed Claudius if at any time the vindictive impulse grew powerful enough, as it might. It was gradually gaining strength, for the other and higher and reflective self was every day growing more and more powerless to check it. Shakespeare could have prolonged this story, and he does prolong it as far as time is concerned. The Hamlet of the earlier pages is comparatively young and the Hamlet of the later pages is old. The old age is not merely mental. Shakespeare did not care to give us the story of the interval, or rather to exhibit Hamlet's madness through such a length of time. It should be too painful to endure. But he would be probably going against the usual facts if he did not consider time in relation to this development of madness. And he considers it when, in the later acts, he suggests that Hamlet is past middle age. Failing to realize the importance of disintegration as the essence of true tragedy, criticism has struggled to reconcile Hamlet's age with theories of early writing, later modifications, and apparent carelessness in Shakespeare. It is rather dangerous to regard Shakespeare as careless, though his companions and, later, editors have unconsciously helped to lay the foundation for a superstition of that



kind when they said Shakespeare never erased a line of what he wrote. Shakespeare never was careless with regard to his essentials. Hamlet's age is not a problem. Shakespeare was deliberate in suggesting both an early and late age for Hamlet. The question of indecision, again, is no longer a problem. Hamlet's two "selves", if we may call them so, exist side by side, and neither is able to completely take possession of him. When one of them does, he acts. The lower and unreflective self with the vindictive impulse firm planted sometimes suddenly gets possession of him, though for a moment, and then he kills Polonius. Later, in the duel, it is further raised to complete mastery and Claudius dies. But the impulse would never last long in him, his reflective self not being altogether overthrown, and the wise and great Shakespeare killed Hamlet with a poisoned sword before he made him kill Claudius. In actual life Hamlet might have continued to live on but Shakespeare the dramatist would concoct a merciful duel. Death relieves Hamlet and his death relieves us as well from the painful tension, but his death lacks an inevitableness about it. The end smacks somewhat of the conventional. But Shakespeare has already realized the full truth of tragedy and, hereafter, even this element of inevitableness will not be missed in other tragedies.

Othello presents that same truth, though in a

different form. In *Othello* the "enemy" enters into the tragic hero only at a later stage; and its workings are far more swift. The interests of the earlier part are purely romantic, except in so far as Iago's soliloquies prepare us for the tragic catastrophe that is to follow. It is usual to think of Iago as only a villain who is necessary to bring about the tragedy, that Iago's character is a contrast to Othello's. This is true enough, but one feels that Shakespeare intended something deeper. Iago conceives an idea, receives an impulse to get even with Othello. In a way this is foreign to his usual sentiments, or rather there are other ideas in him which oppose this impulse. There is consequently conflict in Iago's mind and his soliloquies are a representation of this conflict. It is a narrow view that would consider these soliloquies as merely motive-hunting. Iago is seeking not so much motives as an internal adjustment of the motive impulses within himself. If the two sets of impulses continued uncommensuring in him, he too would have gone on in a "mental conflict", and if there was a violent overthrow of his earlier ideas it must result in a catastrophe for him as well. But such a thing cannot take place, for Iago's earlier ideas are not *totally* opposed to this new impulse of vengeance. And so before long it is possible for him to effect an adjustment and co-ordination. The conflict thereafter ceases. He has made up his mind.

But take Othello: Othello "receives an impulse" (so subtly induced by that arch-criminal who knew human nature only a shade less than his creator) which is opposed to his sentiments. If he had not allowed the enemy to enter him so, Othello would not have done what he did. But the enemy enters; and its admission, unknown to Othello, is complete. Hereafter, however much he might pretend to disbelieve and demand proof, his curiosity is roused and he desires to know more. But this is only a self-deception. He believes, but dares not acknowledge to himself that he has believed so readily. It is easy then for Iago to furnish proofs. When the man has believed, his belief colours all his judgments, and Iago need only so arrange circumstances as to strengthen the belief by appearances. He noticed the weakest spot in the Moor; he did not strike him flat. Othello is too strong and could easily repel it. But Iago knows mankind and he knows his Othello. He has noticed a weak spot, a minute point though it be, but which is enough for him. He inserts the point of his needle there, and like a pricked pneumatic tyre which allows all the air to escape and soon becomes flabby and "dead", Othello's soul admits a leak, and it only wants time for it to be quite dead. The weak spot lay in its sentiments about himself; if you like, his self-regarding sentiment. A man with a very sensitive development of this cannot bear ridicule.

Othello cannot laugh at himself, and he cannot bear ridicule. Iago knows all this, and with but a slightly sarcastic inflection of his voice makes the degrading insinuation. Othello's pride is wounded by the sarcasm, and failing to realize this as the true cause of his pain, he does not resent Iago's conduct, but transfers his resentments to Desdemona. The incongruity of a match between a black Moor like himself and the fair Desdemona is an idea which in his pride he cannot accept. When Iago, however, sarcastically hints at it, he winces and inwardly writhes, and with pain he is forced to admit to himself that it might be a fact. To admit this is for him to admit the possibility of Desdemona's infidelity. Only the subtlest self-examination could have enabled Othello to jump these evident pitfalls of logic into which his pride and vanity seek to hurl him. But his mind is not subtle, nor is he accustomed to self-examination and candid self-criticism. To admit the possibility of Desdemona's infidelity is for him to arrive at actual belief in it. So believing, his soul is cracked, and hereafter everything goes on at breakneck speed in a manner characteristic of the adventurous nature of the man. He is perplexed in the extreme, and he kills Desdemona. But Othello is not the same man; the disintegration of his mental life has been complete, and he cannot be the same man. It is a mistake to consider that Othello killed Desde-

mona purely from motives of jealousy. Jealousy was only the result of his self-deception, a self-deception which resulted from his vanity, a self-deception which resented the suggestion of his racial unsuitness as a husband for Desdemona. His mind rejected the idea of inferiority with resentment and sought to justify its anger for itself by believing in the infidelity of Desdemona. Desdemona, with the intuition of love, recognized the truth about her husband. Othello is not jealous; she cannot understand what was the matter with him. To her he looked like one mad. She felt that her Othello would not behave like this. Othello was changed; he was become mad. And indeed, tossed on the waves of vanity, he is helplessly thrown against the rock of jealousy and thence back again, unable to anchor his soul in the peaceful waters of clear self-knowledge. And Othello, her lover, her husband, did not kill her and she says so. Desdemona loved Othello truly, and with the sympathy born of love she could read her husband's condition more correctly than his critics or the critics of Shakespeare. And when she says that Othello did not kill her, she is telling the truth. How may a madman be held responsible for his acts? Desdemona was not telling a white lie. Again, I repeat, it is dangerous to read Shakespeare with moral and other prepossessions and say that Shakespeare was inconsistent here or there.

One should think that Shakespeare made Desdemona speak like that in order to help towards a clearer comprehension of Othello's true condition. To realize the significance of Desdemona's words is to realize the truth about Othello's situation. Othello, if he continued to live, would soon have shown himself raving mad. There is no return possible for him to normal condition. A disintegrated mind does not so easily return to normality and cohesion. But we are made to realize the disintegration only by degrees, because the disintegrated elements still hang loose together in close enough juxtaposition, close enough to enable him to kill himself on learning the truth about his self-delusion. In Othello the "enemy" produced a disaster; in Iago, who is equally a closely knit and powerful personality, the conflict ended in a perfect adjustment. Notice the difference between Iago's soliloquies in the early part and Othello's in the latter part of the play. The former are the expression of a preliminary conflict leading to adjustment: the latter are the expression of a disintegrated personality with the various elements coming into conflict with one another.

In Iago, Shakespeare intended to furnish a deeper contrast and help us realize the truth if we could see. Both Iago and Othello are "egoists" in their own way. Iago, however, is more reflective and it was easy for him with his "brains" to effect adjustments. Othello

lacked this capacity and, when attacked, tottered and fell. Hamlet was also reflective but Hamlet did not get enough time to reflect. If Hamlet had heard of the murder in the ordinary course of things, he would have thought and thought over the matter before he believed. That would not do; to Shakespeare takes him by storm. Hamlet is told by the ghost himself of the truth, and Hamlet accepts the order for revenge. That is how Hamlet failed where Iago did not; though in Iago's case we should also remember that to Iago, with his experience, revenge was not altogether an idea foreign to his nature. It is not, generally, to any one with a high opinion of himself. Was not the Moor also vindictive?

Turning to *Macbeth*, we find again the same material worked up by Shakespeare. Macbeth does not impress us as an ordinary murderer, though he has committed a most atrocious murder. Our feelings are often truer indications of truth than our cold arguments; and here also they are quite reliable. We do not feel Macbeth to be an ordinary murderer, not because his stake was a kingdom, not because he was imaginative, but because in fact he was *not a murderer* in the ordinary sense of the term. Macbeth did not murder in "cold blood", though he might appear to have "deliberated" and "deliberated". He murdered after his personality had been "cracked", after, in fact, the disintegration

had begun. And the disintegration had begun early enough. It started when the fulfilment of two prophecies led him to believe in the possibility of the third, for with this belief also entered the belief that this third prophecy he should fulfil for himself through his own effort. If he could only have waited in the fatalistic conviction that what was destined would come to pass without his seeking to force the pace, his life would not have ended in a tragedy. But the utterly incongruous suggestion—incongruous, for the other two prophecies came true without his effort—that he must do something for himself he accepted, and with this the "enemy" entered his soul, and the course possible for him: he must realize his ambition. The weight of Lady Macbeth and his ambition was thrown on the side of the "enemy" in him. And looking about as to what he must do, he could only think of "murder" as the means to his end. His mind confused and in a whirl, he could not wait. The chance was too tempting and the impulses within were very urgent and powerful. In a state of chaos, the hostile impulse gained the upper hand for a moment and, with the first flush of victory, it enabled him to kill Duncan. The murder once committed, the cleavage in his soul is complete and established beyond repair.

Macbeth is now no longer the same man. He is



disintegrated mentally, and he now shows all the symptoms. Shakespeare wanted to emphasize the truth clearly, and it is not long before Macbeth sees ghosts and has his hallucinations. He becomes king, but he is not happy. How can he be happy? His unhappiness does not spring from his wife's illness. Both himself and his wife suffer. In both the sufferings are of identical nature. Lady Macbeth, however, Shakespeare does not bring to the front. She has her somnambulisms; she has a "diseased mind". Both the husband and wife are quite changed. As time passes, the change becomes more and more visible. Macbeth becomes a blood-thirsty tyrant; he is considered mad by some. He looks different. But the sight is pitiable; before long Lady Macbeth dies and Macbeth is killed. Death is a relief to them and to us.

In *Lear* the disintegration is easier to see. Lear becomes raving mad. But notice a great difference in treatment. Lear does not "soliloquize". Why? The "crack" in Lear's mind was more swift and violent, the disintegration more complete than in the case of Hamlet or Macbeth, and of a shattering nature at the very beginning. It takes place in the first scene of the play when his favourite daughter, Cordelia, behaves and speaks in a manner so contrary to his sentiments. To say that Lear was a foolish old man, and his tragedy was due to his folly, is thoroughly to misunderstand

Lear and Shakespeare. A fool may rave, but we are not affected as we are by Lear's story. Lear's tragedy is not the tragedy of a fool transformed into a lunatic. Lear was foolish and old, if you like, but an old man who loved to excess. He loved his daughters to such an extent that he almost lived in them. The breath of their affection was the very breath of life to him. So loved Romeo his Juliet, so loved Othello his Desdemona, and the judgment that distinguishes Lear as a fool and justifies Othello and Romeo is cynical. But, whatever our judgment, our feelings do not err. Our heart goes out fully to Lear in his distress. We recognize his great whole-hearted and disinterested love for his daughters—as disinterested as ever affection could be. He was happy in their happiness. What could he do to increase their happiness so that in the increase his own might rise? Divide his Kingdom among them? Yes, he could do that. He would. And the irony of it: just when he raises his happiness to the maximum point, there comes the blow directly and right upon it, and that from the most effective but unexpected quarter. The Kingdom is parcelled out among the daughters, and it is no exaggeration to say that his mind is also being parcelled out, though of this the greatest share belongs to Cordelia—but Cordelia does not receive her share as gratefully as she might have done. It is true she has her justification, but the very impor-

tant point has been missed; Cordelia's matter-of-fact behaviour implied a reflection on the hypocrisy of her sisters, and the old man whose whole life was so closely bound with that of his daughters had the alternative of recognizing the truth or rejecting it, with disappointment and pain in either case. Just at the moment when he hoped for the most intense happiness, he was silently asked to recognize that his love had been based on the insecure foundation that two of his daughters did not love him as much as he thought or wished. Even if such a suspicion entered Lear's mind, he would prefer not to verify it. Even as Othello would not face the truth, the truth about himself, Lear would not face the truth, the truth about his daughters. Cordelia's conduct suggested a suspicion which if found true would knock the old man to pieces. Instinctively he rejected the suspicion from his mind, but he must have an excuse. His mind readily seizes on what circumstances superficially stretch out for him to cling to. Like Othello again, who failed to recognize the truth and transferred his resentment to Desdemona, Lear transfers his bitterness to Cordelia, and thus seeks refuge from the misery of actual facts. Cordelia has shown a lack of enthusiasm; she cannot have much affection, then, for him; he would reject her; much better to reject one daughter than to reject two. But Cordelia has been a favourite with him, and

justly so, which is as much as to say that with all the folly that critics ascribe to Lear, he was a shrewd judge of character. Let us not make a mistake; and it is a mistake to think that Lear's favouritism towards Cordelia was a foolish parent's unreasonable fondness for a youngest daughter. If we on reading the play could feel that Cordelia was pure gold while her sisters were just dross, even a foolish Lear might be expected to have been able to guess something of this sort, seeing that he has watched her grow up with affection and care and all the sympathy and insight that so much affection and care involve. And knowing Cordelia as he did, Lear felt not so much her conduct, as the suggestion which her conduct made that the other two daughters were false, impossible to bear. He did not like to face the truth, and he would not. Rejecting truth, he had to discard Cordelia. Either way it was a wrench which shook him to the very profoundest depths of his soul with a violence which the old man had no strength to bear. Such a shake would crumble him, and it did.

Lear had been living in a fool's Paradise; he had but a short time longer to live and he was old, a creature of habits; he preferred to lie where he was. He was at an age when an interference was incapable of being easily adjusted and should not arise to spoil one's happiness. But misfortune decreed otherwise. He

would not face the truth of his own accord, and he was forcibly confronted with it. He turned away, but he saw just enough. And that shattered his illusion, a big void was created in his heart. He sought to bargain mechanically by rejecting Cordelia and having two daughters still left over. But the bargain again was a fault. In his confusion he could not see clearly. He should have preferred her and rejected the others. Cordelia's sympathy and true affection would have been a solace to him in his misery, for the old man was no longer to know any happiness. But it was not to be. It is not surprising. His judgment was unhinged; he was disintegrated, and the very rejection of Cordelia is the first act, the unerring symbol of the disintegration that has taken place so violently, so swiftly, so suddenly in his life. In rejecting her and clinging to the other daughters he clings only to a rootless creeper. He falls, therefore, into the abyss, and he falls with a mighty crash in a reverberation strong enough to strike flat the thick rotundity of his world.

Probably because he was older the disintegration was so thorough and quick. Cordelia's disobedience broke him, and it only required the disobedience of the other two daughters to shatter him into atoms—to make him raving mad. In this last of his great tragedies Shakespeare seems to point out that disintegration is always madness, and under certain conditions there is no

coming back to normality. But whether this is so or not it is noteworthy that in every one of the three other tragedies the suggestion of madness about the hero is made by someone or other of the characters. In Lear, of course, a formal suggestion is not necessary so far as we are concerned, for we can see for ourselves that Lear was actually mad in the usual sense of the term. But whether disintegration is madness or not, and whether Shakespeare intended to indicate that it was so, we may believe only when our knowledge of this phenomenon is more thorough. The greatness of Shakespeare would seem to lie in the fact that to know him fully we must know more. As far as we know, he is always true. And in regard to his tragedies the material is the disintegration of personality. To say this is not to say everything about them; it is only to recognize their essential nature. There are other great and interesting features about them, but these belong mostly to details of construction and characterization, and do not properly come within the scope of this inquiry. It is enough for us to note that the truth about the nature of Tragedy, as we have considered it to be, is well exemplified in Shakespeare's Tragedies, and, if our analysis is right, it is the only formula which will give a satisfactory explanation of all the tragedies without the necessity for admitting problems such as Hamlet's age and madness, Lady Macbeth's fainting,

Macbeth's seeing ghosts, Desdemona's white lie, and so on.

Now for a last point before we leave off. Contrast Shakespeare's Falstaff with his "tragic heroes". Falstaff could never have submitted to a disintegration. The "enemy" cannot enter his soul or, if it entered, it would only create laughter. Falstaff is humour personified. These tragic heroes, however, every one of them, lack a strongly developed sense of humour. They might have been able to laugh, but they are not able to laugh at themselves. In Macbeth, Othello, Lear, or Hamlet a rich sense of humour would certainly have prevented disaster. We all admit "enemies" sometimes into ourselves, but a sense of humour destroys their capacity for harm. These tragic heroes either had no sense of humour or, possessing it, it failed them at the critical moment. Think how everything must have ended differently if Hamlet had turned away from the ghost, saying with a smile, "Avaunt! thou art an hallucination"; if Othello had laughed heartily at the subtle suggestion of Desdemona's infidelity; if Macbeth had turned off with the remark that he preferred God's ways to the witches'; and if Lear had turned to Cordelia with a smile, though mixed with surprise, and said, "What a matter-of-fact child thou art!" In discussing laughter we realized how laughter is essentially a sign of strength, and if we are

to be able to laugh on life's signal occasions we should indeed have some strength. That we laugh only on minor occasions is because we are weak. Besides, laughter is a safety-valve. And of these tragic heroes of Shakespeare's we may say that they laid themselves open to the possibility of disintegration and disaster because of their signal lack of humour. This was the weak spot in their armour; they collapsed when struck there.



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